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## ABSTRACT

### (RE-)MYSTIFYING THE CITY: THE *MYSTÈRES URBAINS* AND THE PALIMPSEST, 1842-1905

Amy Wigelsworth

This thesis uses the palimpsest as an interpretative lens through which to consider various rewritings of Eugène Sue's *Mystères de Paris*. The corpus date range reflects the extent of the *mystères urbains* phenomenon, from 1842, when serial publication of Sue's novel began, to 1905, when serialization of Jules Lermina's *Mystère-ville* was completed, and after which the *mystères* tended to adopt new settings and new preoccupations.

Chapters I and II provide introduction and contextualization. Chapter III analyses the paratextual matter used to 'package' the texts, specifically prefaces, footnotes and illustrations. Chapter IV considers issues of identity, namely the emergence of the detective character, the role played by secret societies, and the implications of rewriting gender roles. Chapter V deals with geographical and temporal transpositions and Chapter VI compares *feuilleton* and book versions, as well as examining theatre adaptations and parodies. By way of conclusion, Chapter VII underlines the enduring relevance of the *mystères urbains*, as well as suggesting avenues for future research.

The characteristic common to these rewritings is an insistent self-consciousness. Paratexts impinge on texts and become, in an irreverent parody of their own conventions, complicit in the mystification of the reader. Extra-diegetic phenomena, such as the emergence of the detective character, the rise of an eclectic, indeterminate group of popular readers, and the conflation of reading and writing activities encouraged by the serial form, are reproduced *en abyme* within the novels. Similarly, geographical and temporal transpositions transcend their diegetic category, repeatedly proving themselves to have a meta-diegetic resonance. American-set *mystères* reflect the Americanization of culture, while temporal transpositions cultivate confusion between *Histoire* and *histoire*. The reader's attention is deliberately diverted from the mysteries of the cities to the machinations of the text itself. This self-reflexivity is characteristic of literary modernity, but especially prominent in these *mystères urbains*, where the relationship between text and context is a significant one. The city provides not only the subject matter of the *mystères*, but also the forum for the production, consumption, reception and rewriting of the texts.



**(RE-)MYSTIFYING THE CITY:  
THE *MYSTÈRES URBAINS* AND THE PALIMPSEST,  
1842-1905**

**Amy Louise Wigelsworth**

A thesis submitted for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

Department of French  
Durham University

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

For full bibliographical details of these texts, refer to section IX.1.

BAS – *Les Bas-Fonds de Paris*

CHAM – *Paris dévoilé ou les mystères sus*

CONST – *Les Mystères de Constantinople*

INV – *Les Invisibles de Paris*

LILLE – *Les Mystères de Lille*

LOND – *Les Mystères de Londres*

LOND2 – *Les Mystères de Londres [...]. Drame en cinq actes et dix tableaux*

LOU – *Les Loups de Paris*

MARS – *Les Mystères de Marseille*

MOHI – *Les Mohicans de Paris*

MP – *Les Mystères de Paris* (1989 [1842-3])

MVILLE – *Mystère-ville*

NANCY – *Les Mystères de Nancy*

NICE – *Les Mystères de Nice*

NOUV – *Les Mystères du nouveau Paris*

NUITS – *Les Nuits de Paris*

NYORK – *Les Mystères de New-York*

PASSY – *Les Mystères de Passy*

PIEUV – *Les Pieuvres de Paris*

PJ – *Le Petit Journal*

PROV – *Les Mystères de province*

ROUEN – *Les Mystères de Rouen*

SCHOLL – *Les Nouveaux Mystères de Paris*

TOFANI – *Les Mystères de Paris* (1885)

VIEUX – *Les Mystères du vieux Paris*

VRAIS – *Les Vrais Mystères de Paris*



## DECLARATION

I declare that no material presented in this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree at this or any other university.

Material based on parts of this thesis has been published as follows:

‘*Au seuil des bas-fonds: Footnotes in the mystères urbains*’, *Dix-Neuf*, Vol. 16 No. 3, November 2012, 243–59

‘Detection in the second degree in French urban mystery novels’, *Australasian Journal of Popular Culture* (forthcoming), 2013





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‘*Les Mystères de Paris*, on vous les offre partout, en pantomime et en pain d’épice.’

Delphine de Girardin, *Lettres parisiennes*.



## I. INTRODUCTION

On 27 August 2009, I saw a dramatization of Eugène Sue's *Mystères de Paris*, performed in the Bois de Boulogne's Théâtre de Verduze du Jardin Shakespeare.<sup>1</sup> This performance was to spark a veritable fascination for me, with Sue's text in general and with the multiple transformations inspired by it in particular. The significance accorded to the venue for the play, performed, according to the programme, 'sous le ciel de Paris, en plein air, au milieu du Bois de Boulogne' (see Appendix VIII.1), drew my attention to the complex, multivalent status of the city in Sue's novel. Not only did the city constitute the subject matter of the text, it also provided a contextual frame of reference, defining the terms for the text's production and reception. I found myself intrigued by this overlapping of text and context, as well as by the idea that a text which was over 150 years old, and supposedly one of the earliest and best-known examples of 'throwaway' fiction, could be enjoying a new life in a twenty first-century context. I was keen to interrogate the processes of hypertextual transformation that had allowed the text to endure in this way.

If the original inspiration for this project was, admittedly, somewhat personal and anecdotal, then it is important to acknowledge that this dramatization is arguably part of a much more general revival of interest in the *mystères urbains* trend initiated by Sue's novel. At the vanguard of this revival in recent years has been Camilo Castelo Branco's *Mistérios de Lisboa* (1854), which, as *Les Mystères de Lisbonne*, has enjoyed tremendous success in France, both as a 2010 film, directed by Raoul

---

<sup>1</sup> 'Mélodrame de Michel Deque en deux actes et neuf tableaux d'après le roman feuilleton d'Eugène Sue', performed by the Compagnie Les Lustres Théâtre.

Ruiz, which received the Prix Louis-Delluc in the same year, and as a six-part television serial, broadcast on *Arte* in May 2011.<sup>2</sup>

While acknowledging the persistence of Sue's urban mystery archetype right through to the present day, any meaningful evaluation of the 'destin hypertextuel'<sup>3</sup> of this text would, of course, need to trace the phenomenon right back to its roots. As Kalifa explains, Sue's novel was central to a system of repetition and recycling of both narratives and images which was endemic to the latter half of the nineteenth century, in fact so much so that rewriting Sue's text became something of an unconscious reflex among authors:

Au cœur de ce système rayonnent *Les Mystères de Paris*, texte mythique et fondateur qui constitue une sorte de matrice illimitée, sans cesse réactivée. Non seulement les rééditions se succèdent, sans que le roman connaisse jamais de purgatoire : quatorze éditions du vivant de Sue, qui meurt en 1857, dix-neuf rééditions de cette date à 1914, souvent dans des collections à grand tirage (Rouff, Fayard), sans compter les périodiques départementaux qui le resservent fréquemment, les adaptations théâtrales, les chansons, etc. Mais le roman suscite aussi une multitude d'imitations, d'avatars, de plagiat [...], de parodies [...] ou de séries parallèles [...]. Au-delà même, son esthétique et son imaginaire commandent à tel point la sensibilité feuilletonesque du siècle qu'il était sans doute difficile pour les auteurs de ne pas réécrire sans relâche *Les Mystères de Paris*. (Kalifa 2005: 40-1)<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See the official website dedicated to the film and television adaptations:

<http://www.misteriosdelisboa.com/fr/index.html>

<sup>3</sup> I borrow the term from Baguley, who puts forward the hypothesis that quantity and variety of hypertextual transformation may be just as valid an indicator of a text's importance as critical reaction: 'Il serait fascinant de suivre les traces, jusque dans ses multiples manifestations, du destin hypertextuel d'un grand roman comme *L'Assommoir*. A vrai dire, on peut juger, dans une certaine mesure, l'importance d'un texte, non seulement par les évaluations de ses critiques, mais aussi par la quantité et la variété de la production qu'il a engendrée' (1992: 139).

<sup>4</sup> References to the proliferation of hypertextual transformations of *Les Mystères de Paris* are a commonplace feature of accounts of the novel's success. To give just a few examples: Levi evokes the glut of translations (both authorized and unauthorized), pirated editions and serializations abroad, as well as copycat mysteries written on no less than 36 German towns (1992: 638); Mitterand points out the proliferation of *mystères* in other media, such as songs, drawings, engravings, theatre and (later) cinema, all of which fed back into the mythology initiated by Sue (1992: 437); Queffélec describes the phenomenon thus: 'le livre se répand partout : les traductions abondent en italien, en allemand, en hollandais. En Angleterre, Sue éclipsa Dickens. Les *Mystères* surgissent de partout. La pièce adaptée du roman fait un succès le 13 février 1844 à la Porte Saint-Martin. Lithographies, caricatures, assiettes, éventails, etc., reproduisent les personnages et les scènes des *Mystères*' (1989: 16). See also Bory (1962).



Kalifa's compelling image of *Les Mystères de Paris* as 'une sorte de matrice illimitée, sans cesse réactivée' is at the heart of my research questions, namely:

- What were the implications of the constant rewriting of *Les Mystères de Paris*? Can we identify meaningful interactions between the *mystères* and other genres or groups of texts? Does the continual rewriting inevitably engender a degree of self-consciousness in the texts? If so, how does this manifest itself and what are its implications?
- In a period of tremendous literary production, and in particular an abundance of both melodramatic mysteries and fiction about the city, what was the specificity of the *mystères urbains*? If we take the assumption of textual/contextual overlap (the city as both subject matter and publication context) as a starting point, can we pin down this dialogue between city and text in some way? For example, what do the texts have to tell us about communities of readers and about processes of reading and writing in the city?
- Does the *mystères* phenomenon invite us to reconsider binary oppositions of 'literary' versus 'popular' (or 'paraliterary') texts in some way, and if so, how?

A number of pieces of research on the *mystères urbains* should be acknowledged before I delineate my own corpus and approach. In a thesis entitled 'Capital Tales: The Urban Mysteries of Eugène Sue and G.W.M. Reynolds' (2000a), Sara James

documents and interrogates comparisons of Sue's *Mystères de Paris* and Reynolds's *Mysteries of London*, examining the authors' lives, representations of Paris and London, and characterization. Kimberly R. Gladman's thesis, 'Upper Tens and Lower Millions: City Mysteries Fiction and Class in the Mid-Nineteenth Century' (2001), adopts a similar, cross-cultural approach. After considering *Les Mystères de Paris*, city mysteries in other countries, and translation issues surrounding the American edition of Sue's work, Gladman moves on to a detailed examination of city mysteries fiction in the United States, concentrating on issues of class, race and gender. In her thesis 'Reading the Seen: Mystery and Visual Fetishism in Nineteenth-Century Popular Narrative' (2004), Sara Hackenberg examines a corpus comprising French and English (both British and American) texts. Hackenberg's emphasis is on what she terms 'visual fetishism'. The tension between apparently stable visual clues which in actual fact engender deception and uncertainty is personified by the 'master observer' and the 'master of disguise' and the act of seeing becomes a game providing a coping mechanism for technology and urbanization. The most recent publication on the urban mystery phenomenon, *The Mysteries of the Cities: Urban Crime Fiction in the Nineteenth Century* (Knight 2012), is similarly international in approach. Knight analyses Sue's *Mystères de Paris* and Féval's *Mystères de Londres* alongside Reynolds's *Mysteries of London*, Lippard's *The Quaker City* (on Philadelphia), Edward Zane Carroll Judson's *Mysteries and Miseries of New York* and Donald Cameron's *Mysteries of Melbourne Life*.

But recent research also reflects a growing interest in a wide range of French-language *mystères urbains* other than that of Sue. Articles by Letourneux (2007 and 2009) are based on a French corpus, as is Nicolas Gauthier's recent thesis on

repetition and cliché in the *mystères*, ‘La Ville criminelle dans les grands cycles romanesques de 1840 à 1860 : stratégies narratives et clichés’ (2011). The scale and significance of the *mystères urbains* phenomenon has also been acknowledged in works with a broader historical focus, such as Dominique Kalifa’s recent *Les bas-fonds. Histoire d’un imaginaire* (2013: 67-8, 133-4 and 176-7).

Interest among the francophone academic community is clearly in the ascendant, with perhaps the most significant project to date currently spearheaded by the université de Montpellier III. The three-year programme (2011-2014),<sup>5</sup> headed by Marie-Ève Thérenty and post-doctoral researcher Helle Waahlberg, has so far involved the establishment of a database of urban mysteries and the digitization of a number of texts,<sup>6</sup> as well as a series of conferences, with a constant emphasis on the international and the interdisciplinary. My own project draws on this existing body of research, but is original in terms of both corpus and methodology, as I will now demonstrate.

My corpus draws on Letourneux’s 2007 article, which examines the various *mystères urbains* set in Paris. Letourneux identifies two sub-groups, according to the title of the text: ‘l’association des « mystères » et d’une ville [...] permettant de tirer parti de la notoriété du modèle initial, et au contraire, l’association de Paris et d’un terme renvoyant à la dimension romanesque du récit’. I drew up an initial list of texts based on the literature reviewed above, which I then supplemented by a search carried out on the Bibliothèque nationale de France website using the term *mystères* (a strategy which did, of course, only identify the first category referred to by Letourneux) and the date range 1789-1914. A number of additional texts, such as

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<sup>5</sup> <http://rirra21.upv.univ-montp3.fr/programmes/litterature-et-medias/presse-et-litterature-xixe-xxie-siecles/>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.medias19.org/index.php?id=630>

Lermina's *Mystère-ville* and the parodic rewritings, emerged as relevant as my readings and investigations continued.

In terms of the date range chosen, while Sue's text provided an obvious starting point,<sup>7</sup> choosing an end date was more difficult. The choice of Lermina's *Mystère-ville* (1904-5) as my final text (in terms of chronology) was a means of ensuring that both my corpus and its historical timeframe were manageable. The date also reflects the fact that, as Letourneux (2007) remarks, the *mystères* tended to adopt new settings and new preoccupations going into the twentieth century.

Another key point to be made about my corpus is the way in which I have attempted to play down the differences traditionally seen to exist between 'literary' and 'popular' (or 'paraliterary') texts. Interestingly, and rather ironically, the concept of mystery has often been invoked to underline the opacity or 'résistance' of the text, and so perpetuate this distinction. Donoghue (1983) explores in some detail the association of mystery with the profundity and ineffability of art and considers the possibility that, just as priests perpetuate religious mysteries in order to maintain themselves in power, 'artists and critics insist upon the ineffable in art for a similar disgraceful reason, to keep the workers in their lowly place' (1983: 120). In calling for a renewed respect for mystery in the arts, Donoghue plays down this political dimension:

I would want a sense of the mystery of the work of art to pervade anyone's experience of it, whatever degree of naïveté or initiation; and not as something to be dispelled by superior education or concentration of mind and purpose. (1983: 44)<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Note, however, that the dangers inherent to over-emphasizing the originary role of Sue's text are acknowledged in section II.3 below.

<sup>8</sup> The rhetoric of initiation which pervades the *mystères* is discussed in more detail in sections III.1 and IV.2 below.

For Cawelti, traditional, schematic binary oppositions such as ‘literary’ and ‘popular’ stem from the notion of mystery literature as escape and entertainment, whose only value is in relation to the problematic forms of life and art to which it is supposed to provide an antidote. This prevents us from perceiving it as an independent, categorically distinct type of literature:

Because such formulaic types as mystery and adventure stories are used as a means of temporary escape from the frustrations of life, stories in these modes are commonly defined as subliterate (as opposed to literature), entertainment (as opposed to art), lowbrow culture (as opposed to highbrow), or in terms of some other pejorative opposition. The trouble with this sort of approach is that it tends to make us perceive and evaluate formula literature simply as an inferior or perverted form of something better, instead of seeing its “escapist” characteristics as aspects of an artistic type with its own purposes and justification. (1976: 13)

The dangers of an over-zealous separation of ‘literary’ and ‘popular’ texts are hinted at by the ‘paraliterary’ label and its ambiguous prefix. As Miller explains:

“Para” is a doubly antithetical prefix signifying at once proximity and distance, similarity and difference, interiority and exteriority, something inside a domestic economy and at the same time outside it, something simultaneously this side of a boundary line, threshold, or margin, and also beyond it, equivalent in status and yet also secondary or subsidiary [...]. (1979: 219)<sup>9</sup>

According to Couégnas, subscribing to this hackneyed, inflexible distinction between *littérature* and *paralittérature* serves no purpose other than to polarize, prescribe, and perpetuate the stereotype of ‘bad’ paraliterature. As he explains, there is a danger of ending up with ‘un corpus choisi pour sa docilité, en « oubliant » du même coup les œuvres qui ne cadrent pas avec la théorie...’ (1992: 19). In reality:

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<sup>9</sup> On the ambiguity of the prefix, see also Couégnas: ‘Le Robert dit: « Préfixe indiquant le *voisinage*, l’*opposition* ou la *défectuosité*. Ex. : paramnésie (défectuosité de la mémoire « mnêsis » [...]). » Où l’on voit que, dans la relation littérature-paralittérature, et si l’on suit le dictionnaire, il n’y a pas loin de la proximité à la différence, et de la différence à l’opposition...’ (2005: 208).

‘[i]l y a perméabilité entre les productions des « bons » et des « mauvais » auteurs. De plus, la carrière d’un écrivain n’est pas toujours homogène’ (1992: 21).

But however problematic terms such as ‘popular’ and ‘paraliterary’ may be, and however inclusive I have tried to be in constructing my corpus, there can be no denying that the texts I am dealing with demand special methodological considerations. Popular novels are also crucial in that they are part of the context within which ‘literary’ texts are produced and, as I have already intimated when evoking the polyvalent status of the city in *Les Mystères de Paris*, the interplay between text and context is not to be underestimated. As Queffélec argues in the introduction to her survey of the *roman-feuilleton*:

Faire l’histoire du roman-feuilleton, c’est [...] placer les auteurs qu’a retenus notre modernité dans son Panthéon (Balzac, G. Sand, Flaubert, Maupassant, Barbey d’Aurevilly, etc.) au regard de l’immense masse romanesque de laquelle ils émergent (ils la connaissent tous fort bien) et contre laquelle, en un même mouvement, leur œuvre se constitue. (1989: 5-6)

Broadening our critical focus to include different types of literature can therefore only enhance our understanding of a given literary phenomenon: ‘On peut aimer à lire Proust et Kafka – et aussi Dumas, Féval, la BD, la série noire ou le roman policier. Ils sont à explorer et à comprendre l’un et l’autre, voire l’un par l’autre’ (1992: 8).

With these arguments in mind, I have aimed for a similarly broad and inclusive approach to my corpus. I have deliberately chosen a mix of very different authors: *feuilleton* stalwarts such as Pierre Zaccone, Fortuné de Boisgobey and Jules Lermina, authors who dabbled in the *mystères urbains* but enjoyed literary acclaim in other areas, such as Honoré de Balzac and Émile Zola, and writers whose main

interests were arguably in other areas of the arts, such as Aurelién Scholl, who was a journalist and playwright as much as a novelist, and *chansonnier* Aristide Bruant.

In much the same way that my emphasis when selecting the corpus was very much on refusing binary categories, thereby refuting the traditional opposition between ‘literary’ and ‘popular’ texts, so my methodological approach is characterized by attempts to transcend disciplinary boundaries. Those who insist on pursuing a blinkered, exclusively literary approach to *Les Mystères de Paris*, and continue to bemoan Sue’s literary mediocrity as a result are, as Levi explains, surely missing the point:

Attempts to relegate Sue to a historical footnote actually involve an unhistorical trivialization of the role of literature in pre-electronic society, and eventually a dehumanization of the nature and function of literature itself into an unending series of aesthetic refinements. (1992: 639)

Thus rather than focusing exclusively on the literary import of my chosen texts, I have tried to afford equal attention to their historical, sociological and political contexts and implications.<sup>10</sup> In this way, my methodology owes much to the field of cultural studies.

I pay particular attention to the historical, sociological and political implications of the activity of reading, and in so doing draw on the work of Iser (1978), who argues that the analysis of response to a literary text cannot be separated from an analysis of the reading process. The potentiality of the text and the

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<sup>10</sup> De Groot argues for a similarly interdisciplinary approach to the historical novel: ‘The meaning of a text is produced not simply by those directly involved in authoring it but in the ways that it works within society. The book has both a meaning and a cultural value, it works both as a text with content and as something that has an effect within society. [...] We need to think about the ways [the novel] might be produced, consumed, read and used [...]’ (2010: 64). Queffélec also argues for an acknowledgement of the inextricability of literary and social and political histories: ‘L’histoire du roman-feuilleton, bien entendu, comme celle de toute manifestation culturelle, ne se laisse pas isoler de l’histoire sociale et politique. [...] de la contestation romantique au conservatisme bourgeois des débuts de la III<sup>e</sup> République, puis à la prise de distance anarchisante des années 1900, en passant par le désengagement politique du Second Empire, le roman-feuilleton a toujours été, comme le dit J. Tortel, « lié au fonctionnement d’une durée historique qui est la nôtre »’ (1989: 120).

realization engendered by the reading process come together in a ‘dialectic’ and ‘dynamic’ relationship (1978: x, 107). The ‘verbal’ (the guidance offered by the linguistic sign) only initiates the ‘affective’ (the reader’s response, perception and processing, and the contextualization he brings to the text) (1978: 21).

If Iser’s reader-response theory is compelling in general,<sup>11</sup> it seems especially pertinent to this project. Couégnas points out that every bulletpoint of the *modèle paralittéraire* with which he concludes his study includes the words *lecture* or *lecteur*, proving that ‘écriture et lecture [sont] indissolublement liées’ (1992: 183). The ephemeral, ‘throwaway’ nature of the *mystères*, published as newspaper serials and, by and large, now long forgotten, also draws attention to the reading process (rather than the product), as, according to Donoghue, the processes of art ‘reveal themselves best in forms designed not to last; in collages made of bits of paper, made to be replaced and forgotten’ (1983: 101). Reader-response is also particularly pertinent in light of the dates of my primary texts, as Haycraft, in an article on Poe, suggests, explaining how in the nineteenth century, ‘[t]he concept of “literature” for the few was giving way to the idea of “reading” for the many’ (1941: 159).<sup>12</sup>

My interdisciplinary approach is most clearly expressed via the leitmotif of the palimpsest, which I use as a cohesive metaphor to explain and interrogate the various types of ‘rewriting’ at stake in the *mystères*. As Dillon explains: ‘Palimpsests [...] embody and provoke interdisciplinary encounter [...] the palimpsest becomes a figure for interdisciplinarity – for the productive violence of the involvement,

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<sup>11</sup> Riffaterre makes the same point in asserting that ‘[l]e phénomène littéraire n’est pas seulement le texte, mais aussi son lecteur et l’ensemble des réactions possibles du lecteur au texte’ (1971: 333) (Couégnas 1992: 186). Couégnas also notes ‘le glissement opéré depuis deux décennies d’une poétique du texte vers une poétique de la lecture’ (1992: 23). The suitability of a hybrid methodology (combining traditional literary approaches and reader-based response theory) to the study of popular literature was also one of the conclusions of the conference entitled ‘Finding the Plot: on the importance of Storytelling in Popular Fictions’ (University of Leeds, 14-16 April 2010).

<sup>12</sup> On the specific agency of groups (as opposed to individuals) in the city, see IV.2 below.



entanglement, interruption and inhabitation of disciplines in and on each other' (2007: 2). It is to this key trope, as well as to the central notions of mystery and urban space, that my second chapter is devoted.



## II. CONTEXTS

This chapter examines three notions central to my research topic and methodological approach: namely, the evolution and importance of ‘mystery’ as both a narrative and a theoretical concept (II.1); the idea of urban space as a text, as popularized in the nineteenth century (II.2); and the palimpsest trope, applied to both text and city (II.3). I propose a number of revealing links between these ideas, and illustrate the reappropriation and reinscription of each notion by the *mystères urbains*.

### II.1 – LE MYSTÈRE DANS TOUS SES ÉTATS

This section considers the narrative manifestations and the theoretical implications of mystery. I show how the *mystères urbains* drew on elements of both religious and secular mystery narratives and how the introduction of the urban dimension which helped create perhaps the most characteristic mystery formula of the modern period, that of the detective story (Cawelti 1976: 98-9), or *roman policier*, was part of a broader history of generic evolution and hybridity.<sup>1</sup> Finally, I consider mystery as a notion central to the hermeneutic quest and, as such, pertinent to the interpretation of any text.

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<sup>1</sup> According to Sandoe, mystery is ‘a naggingly various form’ (1976: 256), to which ‘the roads [...] are many and varied’ (250). Boucher agrees that ‘[t]hat group of novels which publishers and librarians bracket as “mysteries” has always been a mixed lot’ (1976: 245). Both Sandoe (1976: 256) and Barzun (1970: 249) note that the term has often been used differently in critical terminology and in common or commercial parlance, the latter criticizing those who ‘refer indiscriminately to “crime stories,” “mystery stories,” and “detective stories” as if they were all one.’

## Religious mysteries

In medieval times, the *mystères* were religious dramas depicting scenes from the life of Christ. These flourished in the fourteenth century through the agency of religious fraternities and by the early fifteenth century had evolved into elaborate performances, with increased prominence given to the Virgin Mary and to a realistic presentation of the sufferings of Christ (Reid 1976: 431-2). One of the most famous was Arnould Gréban's *Mystère de la Passion* (1458).<sup>2</sup> There were also, however, mysteries dealing with profane subjects, such as the *Mystère du siège d'Orléans* (recounting the deliverance of Orleans by Jeanne d'Arc) and the *Mystère de la destruction de Troye la grant*. A parliamentary edict of 1548 brought an end to performance of the mysteries in Paris, after which performances gradually diminished throughout France (Reid 1976: 432).

There are a number of interesting parallels to be drawn between these early religious mysteries and my primary texts. The scale of both the religious mysteries and the *mystères urbains* was impressive and elaborate. According to France, 'A typical performance spread over three or four days [...], though some lasted eight, twenty, twenty-five or more, and required hundreds of speaking roles. Preparations – composition of the text, copying out the various manuscripts for actors and producers, rehearsals – inevitably occupied several months' (1995: 552).<sup>3</sup> The length of the performances was an inevitable result of the sweeping scope of the narratives, which covered numerous Old Testament episodes as well as the life of Christ (Beaumarchais and Couty 1994: 1347). These subsidiary episodes functioned as narratives *en abyme*, as Mitterand explains with regard to Gréban's *Mystère de la Passion*: 'des séquences souvent marginales par rapport au thème central [...]

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<sup>2</sup> See Beaumarchais and Couty 1994: 1346-8.

<sup>3</sup> See also Harvey and Heseltine 1959: 503.

fonctionnent comme des œuvres à l'intérieur de l'œuvre, farces ou moralités permettant une participation accrue de la population à ce spectacle intégral, emblématique d'une esthétique nouvelle' (1992: 436).

There are many examples of *mise en abyme* in the *mystères urbains* as well, such as the tale of 'Gringalet et Coupe-en-Deux' in *Les Mystères de Paris* (MP: 1041-63). As well as being a means of managing a complex narrative, these were also symptomatic of the growing self-consciousness of the *mystères urbains*, which demonstrated an increasingly playful awareness of their own techniques as the century progressed.

A wide range of characters were depicted in the religious mysteries:

The characters appearing in the plays were not only saints and martyrs, or pagans and devils; there were many ordinary people, tradesmen, soldiers, peasants, and their wives, even *sots*, who, by their words and deeds, introduced everyday life into the action; thus the serious and inspiring aspects are balanced by an earthy realism. (France 1995: 552)

Sue's social realism demanded a similarly comprehensive cast of characters, from the destitute Morel family to the aristocratic comte de Lucenay. According to Beaumarchais and Couty, it was believed that via socially inferior characters privileged access to the mysteries could be gained:

le public souhaite retrouver le spectacle des types de la rue, clientes qui marchandent, petit peuple qui récrimine contre la police, comme il aime, autour de la crèche, les scènes de bergers. [...] Les bergers qui découvrent le sens plénier du mystère sont les premiers agents de la réflexion sur les faits sacrés. (1994: 1348)

In the same way, it is the lower strata of society who usually facilitate our initiation into the *mystères urbains*. Hence Sue's famous *incipit* in the *Lapin-Blanc tapis-franc*, frequented by the likes of the Chourineur, the Maître d'école and Bras-

Rouge.<sup>4</sup> The nobility and clergy, on the other hand, were often unfavourably depicted (Harvey and Heseltine 1959: 503). Anticlericalism would be a key feature of gothic mysteries, typified by the character of Schedoni in Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho* (Cailliet 1980: 198; Killen 1967: 71) as well as of the *mystères urbains*, with characters such as the charlatan Bradamanti (who masquerades as the abbé Polidori) in *Les Mystères de Paris* and the immoral abbé Donadéi in *Les Mystères de Marseille*.

Good and bad characters were grouped according to simplistic binary oppositions (Beaumarchais and Couty 1994: 1347), reinforced by stage sets opposing Paradise to the East and Hell to the West (France 1995: 552).<sup>5</sup> Prendergast observes similarly 'naive antithetical orderings' (1978: 131) in the melodramatic writing<sup>6</sup> of which the *roman noir* and *roman-feuilleton* were examples.<sup>7</sup>

Gréban took care to give each character 'le registre linguistique approprié à sa condition' (Beaumarchais and Couty 1994: 1348) and Sue's numerous footnotes explaining the *argot* attributed to his underworld characters demonstrate a similar intention.<sup>8</sup> This unconventional mix of linguistic styles (Mitterand 1992: 436) created a comic effect in the religious mysteries. As France puts it, 'Mystery plays were earnest religious plays, but they were also realistic, comic, and even scabrous. Such brusque contrasts often disturb modern critics, used to a clearer separation between tragedy and comedy' (1995: 552-3). Sue's *Mystères de Paris* is a similarly

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<sup>4</sup> Many subsequent *mystères* have very similar opening scenes, featuring gatherings of socially inferior characters, often in insalubrious drinking establishments. See, for example, Lermine's *Mystères de New-York*, access to which will be gained via Trip, Mop and Bam, assembled in the *Old Flag*.

<sup>5</sup> On similarly schematic oppositions between night and day, Christ and the anti-Christ, see Stählin 1937: 28 and 29-30.

<sup>6</sup> Cawelti (1976: 42-3 and 45), although he examines 'Mystery' and 'Melodrama' separately, acknowledges that the former can also be considered as a specialized form of the latter. Prendergast agrees that mystery is 'one of the most elementary structures of melodrama' (1978: 61). See also Brooks 1974: 353.

<sup>7</sup> See also Prendergast 1978: 90-1, 95 and 110.

<sup>8</sup> On the significance and specificity of footnotes in the *mystères urbains*, see III.2.

unlikely generic mix, ranging from the tragedy of death and destitution faced by the Morel family and their daughter Louise to, in the same chapter, the burlesque antics of concierge Madame Pipelet who, in a moment of slapstick, douses Bourdin and Malicorne, the officers who come to arrest Morel and take him to the debtor's prison at Clichy, with a pan of soup (MP: 448-9), as well as those of her husband, tormented by a series of practical jokes at the hands of his mischievous neighbour Cabrion.

Allegations of literary mediocrity characterized the religious mysteries as they did the *mystères urbains*: 'The style of writing was in general vulgar and prolix, without literary pretension' (Harvey and Heseltine 1959: 503). This had inevitable implications for the reception of both. As Reid tells us with regard to the 1548 edict:

The *mystère* had by then fallen into disfavour except among the illiterate: it was condemned by the pious as irreverent (the Protestants regarded it as a profanation of the Bible), and by the cultured as out of harmony with the spirit of the Renaissance. (1976: 432)

The nineteenth-century reception of popular fiction, epitomized by the *mystères urbains*, had clear echoes of this sixteenth-century fall from favour. In *The Mystery Play in Madame Bovary: Mœurs de province*, Rogers, analysing a dialogue between Father Bournisien and the pharmacist Homais in Flaubert's novel, compares the perniciousness and indecency of religious texts to that of popular literature (2009: 16-8):

– C'est comme dans la Bible ; il y a..., savez-vous..., plus d'un détail... piquant, des choses... vraiment... gaillardes !

[...]

– Ah ! vous conviendrez que ce n'est pas un livre à mettre entre les mains d'une jeune personne, et je serais fâché qu'Athalie...

(Flaubert 1999 [1857]: 336)

The emphasis in the religious mystery plays was clearly on ‘mechanics’ rather than ‘aesthetics’. As France puts it: ‘The visual and aural aspects of a mystery play – stage machinery, *voleries*, *feintes*, trap-doors, pyrotechnic effects in Hell, music, noise – were arguably more important than the spoken text. Certainly, producers were paid more than poets’ (1995: 552). This was certainly the case in the *mystères urbains* as well, where dramatic twists and turns took precedence over more subtle stylistic considerations. This emphasis on the drama of exposition, rather than more probing explanation or interpretation, is crucial to the notion of mystery. As Beaumarchais and Couty explain, ‘Le travail du fatiste n’est pas d’expliquer, ni d’interpréter, mais de donner à voir « la chose sensible »’ (1994: 1347). The religious mystery is thus to be contemplated and marvelled at, while always ultimately defying complete understanding, and thereby retaining its essential ineffability and intractability. According to Stählin:

The divine mystery does not cease to be mystery even when it has been revealed. It remains the invisible, the unutterable, the inconceivable, the unsearchable, and unapproachable. The divine mystery can be proclaimed and testified, it can also be betrayed but it cannot be made “public property”. (1937: 14)

But Stählin’s reference to ‘public property’ becomes decidedly ironic in the context of the *mystères urbains*, in that it was the very elusiveness and insolubility of the popular mystery, whose resolution was continually postponed, leaving the reader *sur sa faim*, which ensured its continued commercial viability. The final lines of Octave Féré’s *Mystères de Rouen* are a good example of this:

[...] si nous arrêtons ici, ce n’est pas que nous ayons tout dit, tout dévoilé sur les mystères douloureux de cette ville de Rouen, de cette ancienne capitale du



pays de Sapience, aux aspects si divers, aux contrastes si éloquents. Nous n'avons levé qu'un coin du rideau. (ROUEN: 370)<sup>9</sup>

Thus the sense of elusiveness and ineffability of the religious mystery narrative survived in the *mystères urbains*, but increasingly became synonymous with inexhaustible commercial potential.

### **Secular mysteries: from gothic novel to *roman policier***

Alice Killen's study, *Le roman « terrifiant » ou roman « noir » de Walpole à Anne Radcliffe et son influence sur la littérature française jusqu'en 1840* (1967), analyses a number of well-known eighteenth-century English novels, from Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* (1764) to Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and *The Italian* (1797) and Lewis's *The Monk* (c. 1795).<sup>10</sup> This kind of fiction flourished in France, in response to an insatiable appetite for mystery and violence in the wake of the French Revolution (Killen 1967: 80; Cailliet 1980: 1), where the term gothic novel was increasingly replaced by 'roman « terrifiant » ou roman « noir »' (Killen 1967: 17; Cailliet 1980: 4).

According to Cawelti, the early nineteenth-century fascination for gothic fiction stems from 'the complex of feelings surrounding the breakup of long-established social and spiritual hierarchies in Europe' (1976: 101). The authority of the church and the aristocracy were weakened but not completely destroyed, retaining 'a complex psychological ambiguity', hence 'those two favourite gothic villains, the corrupt monk and the decadent and scheming lord of the mysterious

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<sup>9</sup> Theatrical metaphors are considered in more detail in section VI.2 below.

<sup>10</sup> See also Cailliet 1980: 5.

castle' (Cawelti 1976: 101). Although religious themes continued to be important,<sup>11</sup> modes of explanation and reaction, to crime in particular, relied increasingly on psychology, sociology and science, rather than religion and morality (Cawelti 1976: 54 and 58).<sup>12</sup> Radcliffe's *Udolpho*, in which she attempts to resurrect the sense of mystery quashed by the unromantic rationalism of post-Enlightenment culture (Castle 1998: xxi-xxii and xxv), is a case in point. The various definitions of *mystère* proposed by the *Grand Dictionnaire Universel du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* bear testament to the fact that religion was just one element of what was evolving into a complex and multidisciplinary notion. The dictionary acknowledges that while *mystère* can still refer to '[un] secret religieux', it is also used to evoke, more generally '[c]e qui est tenu secret : les MYSTERES de la politique. Un MYSTERE d'état. Conduite pleine de MYSTERE. [...]'. Similarly, the term refers to both '[un] [d]ogme ou fait religieux inaccessible à la raison' and, more broadly, to any '[o]bjet inaccessible à la raison humaine ou à la raison d'un homme : les MYSTERES de la nature [...]' (Larousse 1866-78).

Radcliffe was thus 'a purveyor of mysteries – but of a new kind, adapted for a secular age' (Castle 1998: xx-xxi). Religious characters in *Udolpho* are little more than 'decorative [...] picturesque adjuncts to the action' (Castle 1998: xxii), with Radcliffe relocating her mysteries to the realms of imagination and psychology (Castle 1998: xxii, xxiii, xxiv, xxv). Human consciousness is given a supernatural, magical depiction (Castle 1998: xxiv), only to have this explained away by the end of the novel.

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<sup>11</sup> On the theme of divine providence in melodrama, see Cawelti 1976: 123 and 124 and Prendergast 1978: 41 and 94. On the religious aspects of Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* and *The Brothers Karamazov*, see Cawelti 1976: 124-5.

<sup>12</sup> On crime as sin see also Sayers 1928-9: 102. On differing definitions of crime and mystery across different time periods due to changes in legality and morality, see McSherry 1970. On human mystery and personal spiritual life, see Stählin 1937: 82-4.

The *mystères urbains* have regular recourse to horrifying and fantastical elements. Zybinn's *Mystères de Nice* includes a story entitled 'La comtesse Ventourini ou le mystère', in which a young Italian poet moves to the mountains above the city, where he falls in love with his aristocratic neighbour, who always wears a thick veil. She reveals her disfigured face when he proposes marriage to her. Horrified, the poet jumps from the mountain to his death:

Le poète jeta un cri perçant. Il venait de voir devant lui une tête de mort, au lieu du nez, la comtesse Mercédès avait deux trous noirs. Sans prononcer un mot le poète s'élança dans le salon voisin où un balcon donnait sur des rochers et il s'y précipita. (NICE II: 33)

The scene is similar to many found in gothic fiction, such as the following encounter between Lorenzo and Agnes in Lewis's *The Monk*:

Elle leva lentement son voile. Que vis-je ? Un corps inanimé. Sa figure était longue, son air hagard ; ses joues et ses lèvres étaient totalement décolorées. La pâleur de la mort était répandue sur ses traits, et les deux prunelles de ses yeux, fixés obstinément sur moi, étaient creuses et sans couleur. Frappé d'une inexprimable horreur, je sentis, à la vue du spectre, mon sang se glacer dans mes veines. Je voulais appeler au secours ; les sons expiraient sur mes lèvres. (Killen 1967: 45-6)<sup>13</sup>

There are also numerous examples of Radcliffe's favoured technique of the 'surnaturel expliqué' (Killen 1967: 85; xi and xiv) in the *mystères urbains*. In Féré's *Mystères de Rouen*, mysterious night-time visitations add a distinctly Radcliffian note.<sup>14</sup> A traveller spends the night at a château and stays in the room of Adèle de Villers, the comtesse de Vernant who, we are told, has been dead for many years. Unable to sleep, he is visited by the comtesse's 'ghost', who says her husband is

<sup>13</sup> I have kept Killen's translation into French, to aid comparison with the passage from Zybinn.

<sup>14</sup> See Radcliffe's *Roman de la Forêt* (Killen 1967: 21). See also 'Alphonsine, roman que M<sup>me</sup> de Genlis publia en 1806 [qui], tout en rappelant l'*Adèle et Théodore* du même auteur, rappelle aussi, sous beaucoup de rapports, le *Sicilien* d'Anne Radcliffe, avec sa donnée de victime malheureuse, emprisonnée dans un souterrain par un mari coupable' (Killen 1967: 95).

trying to poison her and gives him a lock of her hair. The next day, he cannot find how she could have got into the room. It emerges that twenty years previously Henri de Carval and Adèle, who was unhappily married to the middle-aged Vernant, had fallen in love. Threatened by the comte, Henri was forced to abandon his lover and leave France for fifteen years. It finally emerges that Adèle has been imprisoned by her husband in the castle's underground vaults. Her night-time appearances are due to sleepwalking episodes, of which she has no recollection when awake.

But the *mystères urbains*, frequently as a result of their urban setting, also came to transcend the gothic model, rather than merely reproducing its familiar apparatus. A good example of this is the well-worn gothic motif of mysterious music,<sup>15</sup> which we find in Zybinns' *Mystères de Nice*. In 'Une romance', the narrator, while strolling through the city, is intrigued by a woman he hears singing and vows to do everything he can to track her down and discover the story behind the song:

C'était à Nice. Je me promenais à la tombée de la nuit dans une des belles avenues de la nouvelle ville, lorsque passant devant une élégante villa, j'entendis une ravissante voix de femme qui chantait une romance avec beaucoup d'expression. [...] Tout cela avait éveillé ma curiosité. Comment pénétrer le mystère qui paraissait caché dans ces paroles énigmatiques ? Quel était ce roman qui jetait une note si triste dans la vie de cette jeune femme ? Il fallait absolument que je le découvre. (NICE II: 87-8)

The story ends in typical fashion, with the broken-hearted female character, la Comtesse B., becoming a nun, while the prince who has broken an earlier promise to her and married another woman goes mad and dies. Despite this predictably sombre dénouement, the detective-like perseverance of the narrator, who makes a meticulous note of the number of the villa and pursues his investigations, aided by his privileged

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<sup>15</sup> In *Udolphi*, 'Émilie, seule dans sa chambre, entend des bruits étranges, une musique mystérieuse, jouée le soir sous sa fenêtre' (Killen 1967: 24). See also Killen 1967: 65, 112 and 115.

access to *niçoise* society ('tout ce qui se passe à Nice ne peut me rester longtemps inconnu' (NICE II: 88)) points to a mystery narrative which, far from resting on its gothic laurels, was still evolving.

As Tanner, in his preface to Prendergast (1992), explains, from the nineteenth century, the city, rather than the church, was the focus of mystery and meaning:

the city became both mysterious and ubiquitous, unknowable and inescapable, housing the past and determining – or destroying – the future. Increasingly, meaning no longer comes from the church, the court or the manor, but is produced – and reproduced – in the city. (1992: ix)<sup>16</sup>

The urban setting facilitates 'the elaboration of larger, more complicated systems of connection', for which 'the unifying context is provided [...] by the phenomenon of the modern city' (Prendergast 1978: 68). Prendergast is emphatic in his explanations of how the modern city setting drove further development of the mystery narrative:

In his study of Baudelaire, Walter Benjamin has pointed to the link between the growth of the mystery story and a developing urban history [1973: 40-4], and it is clear that the experience of the size, anonymity and complexity of the modern city provided an extremely fruitful terrain for the increasingly labyrinthine ramifications of the mystery story. In the sphere of French popular fiction, the paradigm of this development is of course Eugène Sue's *Les Mystères de Paris*. Both of the major terms of Sue's title have to be given equal emphasis: a huge, rambling structure, the novel weaves and unravels a vast network of mysteries into which are drawn and interconnected criminal, aristocrat, proletarian, bourgeois, and whose rudimentary unity is founded on the shared context of contemporary Paris. (1978: 68-9)

This idea of a 'shared context' is crucial, in that for the first time we are dealing with what Gill refers to as a kind of domestic tourism, according to which there is an unexpected exoticism to be found in the unknown areas of otherwise familiar urban spaces (2009: 176 and 213). The phenomenon has been remarked upon by urbanists:

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<sup>16</sup> See also Prendergast's evaluation of 'the change from the remote Gothic castle to the modern urban setting [as] a fact of major literary and sociological importance' (1978: 61-2).

Or, dans le temps même où la ville du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle commence à prendre son visage propre, elle provoque une démarche nouvelle, d'observation et réflexion. Elle apparaît soudain comme un phénomène extérieur aux individus qu'elle concerne. Ceux-ci se trouvent devant elle comme devant un fait de nature, non familier, extraordinaire, étranger. (Choay 1965: 12)

It was also noticeable in literature. As Henry James, articulating a preference for Wilkie Collins's treatment of the exotic rather than that of Radcliffe, puts it: 'To Mr. Collins belongs the credit of having introduced into fiction those most mysterious of mysteries, the mysteries which are at our own doors. [...]' (Castle 1998: xvii).<sup>17</sup>

The city, then, was to provide a new and surprisingly fertile terrain for the mystery narrative, but the mystery formula would soon need a new dimension to offset the domestic exoticism which, though a rich vein for writers such as Sue, was also something of a threatening prospect, symptomatic of dramatic and disconcerting change. In particular, urban populations had exploded as a result of the industrial revolution, leaving many unable to distinguish between 'classes laborieuses' and 'classes dangereuses'.<sup>18</sup> The new element which would redress the balance was to come in the form of the classical or ratiocinative<sup>19</sup> detective story, of which Edgar Allan Poe was one of the earliest exponents, in a series of mystery stories set in Paris: 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue', 'The Mystery of Marie Rogêt' and 'The Purloined Letter'.<sup>20</sup> Mystery would henceforth be 'a dominant formulaic principle in its own right',<sup>21</sup> thrown into relief by the presence of a second principle, variously described as 'reasoning', 'ratiocination', 'investigation' or 'detection' (Cawelti 1976:

<sup>17</sup> Castle's quotation is from James's 'Mary Elizabeth Braddon', cited in Edel (1984: 742).

<sup>18</sup> See Chevalier 2007 [1958].

<sup>19</sup> As Lowndes explains, inductive and deductive reasoning were referred to as 'ratiocination' in the early nineteenth century (1970: 1-2).

<sup>20</sup> See Cawelti 1976: 80 and Lowndes 1970: 2.

<sup>21</sup> As Cawelti explains, prior to the classical detective story (and unlike the formulae of adventure and romance), mystery had been 'far more important as a subsidiary principle in adventure stories, romances, and melodramas' (1976: 43).

107; 108; 119 and 120): the combination of these two elements would be central to the genesis of the detective story.<sup>22</sup>

As Cawelti explains, the two elements combine to respond to ‘two rather different psychological needs’: while mystification, disorder and uncertainty in a variety of guises (crime, violence, danger, death and sex), offer escape from ‘boredom and ennui’, ratiocination and the clarity, order, logic, certainty, familiarity and formula associated with it, in terms of both form and content, allow a controlled confrontation of various ‘insecurities and ambiguities’ (1976: 15-6).<sup>23</sup> The mystery formula thus comes into its own in the urban setting, where it provides the ‘cultural stability’ needed to offset the ‘discontinuous, pluralistic culture [...] of modern industrial societies’ (Cawelti 1976: 35), exemplified in the city. After the process of secularization seen in gothic fiction, the mystery narrative would now undergo an urbanization. It is by proposing, popularizing and exploring the urban setting that the *mystères urbains* form a crucial link between gothic mystery and the *roman policier*.

### **Mystery and the hermeneutic quest**

This survey of ‘mystery’ would not be complete without a brief consideration of the theoretical implications of the term. Hermeneutics, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, is the branch of knowledge that deals with interpretation. The notion of mystery has traditionally been central to the hermeneutic quest.

Much like the narrative incarnations discussed above, the theoretical concept of mystery appears to have undergone something of a shift from the religious to the secular in the modern period. Although hermeneutics originally dealt with the

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<sup>22</sup> See also Laverne's tracing of the trajectory from the late eighteenth-century English gothic novel to the *roman policier*, via the *mystères urbains* (2009: 52-3).

<sup>23</sup> See also Aydelotte 1970: 311; Berger 1973: 35; Cawelti 1976: 8-9 and 108; and Sayers 1928-9: 71-2.

interpretation of Scripture, the term is now used more generally, to refer to the interpretation of literary texts, or other cultural artefacts. Traditional literary criticism embraced the notion of a single, hidden meaning, sealed within the text by an Author-God and extracted through interpretation. As Barthes put it, '*l'auteur* est un dieu (son lieu d'origine est le signifié); quant au critique, il est le prêtre, attentif à déchiffrer l'Écriture du dieu' (1970: 166).<sup>24</sup> But post-structuralism and New Criticism have challenged these assumptions.<sup>25</sup> In 'La mort de l'auteur', Barthes writes:

Nous savons maintenant qu'un texte n'est pas fait d'une ligne de mots, dégageant un sens unique, en quelque sorte théologique (qui serait le message de l'Auteur-Dieu), mais un espace à dimensions multiples, où se marient et se contestent des écritures variées, dont aucune n'est originelle : le texte est un tissu de citations, issues des mille foyers de la culture. [...] la littérature [...], en refusant d'assigner au texte [...] un « secret », c'est-à-dire un sens ultime, libère une activité que l'on pourrait appeler contre-théologique [...]. (1968: 493-4)

This rejection of the assumption of an Author-God has meant that criticism has adopted a functionalist approach, whose focus is not the meaning of the text, but rather its effect (Iser 1978: 26 and 53). Just as the broader field of cultural studies emphasizes the contextual factors which shape a given text, so reader-response theory emphasizes the reading process, rather than the textual product (Iser 1978: 18-9), by concentrating on the 'productive participations' of the reader (Prendergast 1978: 185) and his 'subjective contribution' (Iser 1978: 19):

Un texte est fait d'écritures multiples, issues de plusieurs cultures et qui entrent les unes avec les autres en dialogue, en parodie, en contestation ; mais il y a un lieu où cette multiplicité se rassemble, et ce lieu, ce n'est pas

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<sup>24</sup> On 'l'écrivain-Dieu', see also Rabaté (2000: 11-2 and 20). Note also the obvious affinities between Author and God suggested in descriptions of divine mystery: 'The divine mystery is God's mystery, precisely and chiefly in the sense that God alone can reveal this, His mystery, which is Himself' (Stählin 1937: 15).

<sup>25</sup> See also Iser's discussion of this (1978: 4-5 and 15).



l'auteur, comme on l'a dit jusqu'à présent, c'est le lecteur [...] ce *quelqu'un* qui tient rassemblées dans un même champ toutes les traces dont est constitué l'écrit. (Barthes 1968: 495)

The differing emphases placed on author and reader have inevitable implications for the classification of the literature we are dealing with as 'literary' or 'popular'. The view of the text which stresses the reader's contribution and participation corresponds to Barthes's notion of the *scriptible*, or 'writerly', text: 'Pourquoi le scriptible est-il notre valeur ? Parce que l'enjeu du travail littéraire (de la littérature comme travail) c'est de faire du lecteur, non plus un consommateur, mais un producteur du texte' (1970: 10).<sup>26</sup>

The author-centric view of the text, on the other hand, corresponds to Barthes's *lisible*, or 'readerly', text. As Barthes puts it, '[d]onner un Auteur à un texte, c'est imposer à ce texte un cran d'arrêt, c'est le pouvoir d'un signifié dernier, c'est fermer l'écriture' (1968: 147); 'les textes lisibles [...] sont des produits (et non des productions), ils forment la masse énorme de notre littérature' (1970: 11).

The readerly text is a closed text, consumed and effectively exhausted by both reader and critic:

if this meaning, as the very heart of the work, can be lifted out of the text, the work is then used up – through interpretation, literature is turned into an item for consumption. This is fatal not only for the text but also for literary criticism, for what can be the function of interpretation if its sole achievement is to extract the meaning and leave behind an empty shell? (Iser 1978: 4-5)<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> See also Iser 1978: 48.

<sup>27</sup> On explicit, ready-made meaning, and the feeling of anticlimax accompanying 'light reading', see also Iser 1978: 46. Prendergast warns us against reading Balzac's *Béatrix* in this way: 'To try and resolve the enigma would [...] be to react in the wrong way; it would be to engage in a reductive, explanatory exercise in violation of the spirit of the writing itself, which momentarily suggests something of the irreducible mystery of human personality. It is a moment that we simply experience and whose integral opaqueness we must respect. The narrative proceeds, and all that the reader can do is to go along with it, thinking what he will' (1978: 125). Interestingly, the relationship to divine mystery is rather ambiguous here. Prendergast warns against the search for a single, 'theological' meaning, while at the same time encouraging a certain reverence for the irreducible nature of mystery.

The literary/paraliterary debate is not, however, the focus of this study, as already stressed in my introduction. Where the difference between texts as ‘author products’ and texts as ‘reader productions’ *does* become pertinent is in considering the publication format of the *mystères urbains* and the implications of this. The *mystères* typically appeared in serial instalments before being published in single or multiple book volumes. Research has shown that publication format has clear hermeneutic implications. Iser, for example, explains how the serial format accentuates blanks and negations in the text (1978: 169-70), calling on the ‘constitutive’, ‘synthesizing activity’ (1978: 169-70, 119) of the reader. Chapter VI.1, in which I compare serial and book publications, returns to this theory of reader response.

The idea that ‘the interpreter’s task should be to elucidate the potential meanings of a text, and not to restrict himself to just one’ (Iser 1978: 22) is also important in terms of the notion of the palimpsest.<sup>28</sup> The idea of the writerly text compares the practice of reading to that of writing, an equivalence famously proposed by Borges’s Pierre Menard, and obliges us to consider new interpretations, new ‘readings’, as hypertextual transformations.<sup>29</sup>

A further reason for acknowledging the theoretical implications of mystery is that they help us to understand the self-consciousness which characterized the *mystères urbains* as the genre became more and more established. Because mystery is not just a diegetic concern of the *mystères urbains*, but integral to the search for meaning in *all* texts, and indeed an integral part of communication in general, the *mystères*, inevitably, became increasingly self-reflexive as the nineteenth-century progressed. Difference and imbalance between two parties drives all communication,

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<sup>28</sup> See II.3 below.

<sup>29</sup> As Barthes puts it: ‘le texte scriptible, c’est *nous en train d’écrire*’ (1970: 10). For a detailed exploration of this overlap of the reading and writing processes, communicated via similarly ambiguous and overlapping representations of masculinity and femininity, see section IV.3 below.

as Iser explains: ‘Social communication [...] arises out of contingency (behavioral plans do not coincide, and people cannot experience how others experience them), not out of the common situation or out of the conventions that join both partners together’ (1978: 166).<sup>30</sup> In literature, similarly, this imbalance takes the form of an asymmetry between text and reader, calling the reader into action to compensate for the discrepancies and fill in the gaps. The point is one made by both Iser and Barthes:

it is the gaps, the fundamental asymmetry between text and reader, that give rise to communication in the reading process; the lack of a common situation and a common frame of reference [...] bring[s] about the interaction.  
(Iser 1978: 166-7)

les littératures sont en somme des arts du « bruit » ; ce que le lecteur consomme, c’est ce défaut de la communication, ce manque du message ; ce que toute la structuration édifie pour lui et lui tend comme la plus précieuse des nourritures, c’est une *contre-communication* ; le lecteur est complice, non de tel ou tel personnage, mais du discours lui-même en ce qu’il joue la division de l’écoute, l’impureté de la communication : le discours, et non tel ou tel de ses personnages, est le seul héros *positif* de l’histoire.  
(Barthes 1970: 139)

This means that all mystery fiction has an inevitable metafictional dimension. The interplay between order and disorder we have already noted in the diegeses of mystery and detective fiction echoes what Iser refers to as a ‘pattern of disturbance and mastery’ characteristic of literature in general (1978: 43). Mystery, as well as being a key diegetic concern, is also a particularly apt *metaphor* for what Barthes calls the hermeneutic code (1970). Barthes explains how the trope of initiation points to the irregularities of narrative itself, peppered with ‘des retards (chicanes, arrêts,

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<sup>30</sup> Iser uses a number of different terms to describe this: ‘Asymmetry, contingency, the “no-thing” – these are all different forms of an indeterminate, constitutive blank which underlies all processes of interaction’ (1978: 167).

dévoiements)’: ‘Ce dessin rapproche le récit du rite initiatique (un long chemin marqué d’embarras, d’obscurités, d’arrêts [...])’ (1970: 75).<sup>31</sup>

Twentieth-century fiction has consistently exploited this metafictional inclination, as Cawelti shows with reference to the works of Robbe-Grillet, Borges and Nabokov (1976: 137). In subsequent chapters I will argue that this self-consciousness is also showcased, particularly successfully, in the *mystères urbains*: Chapter III considers the self-conscious use of paratexts; Chapter IV looks at the self-conscious reappropriation of the hunting metaphor, at representations of groups, used to fictionalize the fears surrounding a growing contingent of popular readers, and at representations of femininity, which reflect a synthesis of reading and writing processes; Chapter V considers the Americanization of the city as a metaphor for the Americanization of the text, as well as a *rapprochement* of *Histoire* and *histoire*, which results in a self-conscious foregrounding of the texts’ devices; Chapter VI looks at the self-consciousness inherent to serializations of the *mystères*, which stems from the fact that the city provides not only the subject matter for the texts, but also the context for their production and reception, as well as at the importance of performance to urban life, as showcased in theatre adaptation, and finally at parodies of Sue’s text, which, it emerges, are concerned more with a self-conscious unveiling of the hypotext’s devices, than with mystery at the level of the diegesis. This tendency for self-reflexivity points to an important role for the *mystères* as a precursor of modernist and postmodernist fiction.

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<sup>31</sup> On initiation, see III.1 and IV.2 below.

## II.2 – READING URBAN SPACE: THE CITY AS TEXT

This second contextual section will consider the adjectival element of the term *mystères urbains*, drawing in particular on the concept of the city as text popularized in the nineteenth century. I will consider spatial form as it relates to language and literature in general; I will then consider the specific metaphor of the city as a text, looking in particular at the genre of the *physiologie* and the figure of the *flâneur*; I will illustrate the specific resonance of the city-text analogy in the context of the *mystères urbains*; finally, in order to explain and defend my use of the analogy in this study, I will acknowledge the limitations of what Rabkin describes as a ‘seductive metaphor’ (1977: 269-70).

### **Spatial form in language and literature**

According to Genette, language and writing are inherently spatial (1969: 45). Mallarmé’s 1897 poem *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard*, with its distinctive layout and typography, heralded a new interest in the materiality of the text, which served to heighten critical awareness of this spatiality (Genette 1969: 45; Frank 1978: 289-90).

As Rabkin points out, ‘many modern narrative techniques tend to spatialize our understanding of narrative’ (1977: 253). Spatiality is indeed so engrained in critical discourse that the original, spatial meanings of many terms are frequently forgotten. Mitchell recalls a number of these to our attention:

Clearly the entire vocabulary of formalism is riddled with spatial concerns, [such as] the central notions of form, structure, plot,<sup>32</sup> and imagery [...] But

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<sup>32</sup> Mitchell describes this as ‘[p]erhaps the most important spatial metaphor in narrative analysis’, suggesting ‘a cultivated patch of ground or a devious, intricate design’ (1980: 552).

we also construct space through other senses, such as touch, and embody this dimension in the implicitly tactile metaphor of a “text” (literally, that which is woven; web, texture),<sup>33</sup> hardly a casual metaphor for the reader of braille. (1980: 547)<sup>34</sup>

According to Genette, it is in literary works specifically that the spatiality of language is exemplified:

Cette spatialité du langage considéré dans son système implicite, le système de la langue qui commande et détermine tout acte de parole, cette spatialité se trouve en quelque sorte manifestée, mise en évidence, et d’ailleurs accentuée, dans l’œuvre littéraire, par l’emploi du texte écrit. (1969: 45)<sup>35</sup>

The idea of literature as a spatial phenomenon has proved extremely appealing in the domains of both literature and theory. Both Proust and Wordsworth, for example, compare their literary *œuvre* to a cathedral (Frank 1978: 290; Mitchell 1980: 562), while Derrida, in *De la grammatologie* (1967b), refers to ‘[le] monde comme espace de l’inscription’, thereby likening the entire world to a text (See Mitchell 1980: 565). The analogy I will pursue in this study can be situated midway between Proust and Derrida, and is perhaps most famously proposed by Hugo in *Notre-Dame de Paris* (1831). In a particularly famous chapter entitled ‘Ceci tuera cela’, Hugo posits an equivalence between the city and the text, describing architecture as a kind of writing, pitting the two types of writing (in stone and in print) against each other, and concluding that the book will ultimately destroy the city.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> On text as *tissu*, see also II.1 and II.3.

<sup>34</sup> On concepts common to both literature and the visual arts, such as ‘imitation, representation, expression, and style’ and ‘perspective, background and foreground, the picturesque, local color’, see Mitchell (1980: 547-8).

<sup>35</sup> See also Genette 1966: 108.

<sup>36</sup> See Barthes 1967: 262-3; Choay 1965: 78-9 and Rabaté 1997: 5.

### The city as text

The analogy proposed by Hugo captured the literary imagination. He would return to the idea of ‘reading’ the city in *Les Misérables* (1867), in which the sewers are ‘consulted as a kind of archive or document’ (Prendergast 1992: 89), written in ‘a strange script (‘quelque bizarre alphabet d’orient’)’ (Prendergast 1992: 93).<sup>37</sup>

In his essay ‘A Defence of Detective Stories’, G.K. Chesterton uses the same analogy, arguing that the city functions as a text because it is a man-made, purpose-built entity:

The lights of the city begin to glow like innumerable hobgoblin eyes, since they are the guardians of some secret, however crude, which the writer knows and the reader does not. Every twist of the road is like a finger pointing to it; every fantastic skyline of chimney-pots seems wildly and derisively signalling the meaning of the mystery.

This realization of the poetry of London is not a small thing. A city is, properly speaking, more poetic even than a countryside, for while Nature is a chaos of unconscious forces, a city is a chaos of conscious ones. The crest of the flower or the pattern of the lichen may or may not be significant symbols. But there is no stone in the street and no brick in the wall that is not actually a deliberate symbol – a message from some man, as much as if it were a telegram or a post-card. The narrowest street possesses, in every crook and twist of its invention, the soul of the man who built it, perhaps long in his grave. Every brick has as human a hieroglyph as if it were a graven brick of Babylon; every slate on the roof is as educational a document as if it were a slate covered with addition and subtraction sums. (1976 [1901]: 4-5)<sup>38</sup>

Theoretical texts based on the same analogy soon followed, such as Lévi-Strauss’s *Tristes Tropiques* (1955), in which he uses a semantic approach to study a Bororo village.<sup>39</sup> In *The Image of the City* (1960), Lynch takes the idea of urban semantics even further, identifying five formal types of image elements into which the city image can be usefully divided: paths, landmarks, edges, nodes and districts (1960: 8

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<sup>37</sup> Prendergast’s reference is to Hugo 1951 [1867]: 1309. Note also Prendergast’s comparison of Hugo’s sewers to Sue’s streets (1992: 93).

<sup>38</sup> On this passage from Chesterton, see also Sirvent 2000: 82.

<sup>39</sup> On the subject of which, see also Barthes 1967: 262 and Soucy 1971: 5.

and 46).<sup>40</sup> Using these elements, Lynch explores the idea of the ‘legibility’<sup>41</sup> of the city:

By this we mean the ease with which its parts can be recognized and can be organized into a coherent pattern. Just as this printed page, if it is legible, can be visually grasped as a related pattern of recognizable symbols, so a legible city would be one whose districts or landmarks or pathways are easily identifiable and are easily grouped into an overall pattern. (1960: 2-3)

Lynch stresses ‘the special relevance of this quality to the particular case of the complex, shifting urban environment’ (1960: 10).

In ‘Sémiologie et urbanisme’ (1967), Barthes picks up where Lynch left off. He had already described his experiences when discovering Japan as identical to the experience of reading a text (Rabaté 1997: 3) and, in this new essay, pursues the notion of ‘the signifying function of cities’ (Rabaté 1997: 5), concluding that the city is not just a text, but specifically an *open* text, whose signs are not fixed but open to interpretation by a ‘lecteur d’avant garde’ (Barthes 1967: 444). This notion of the city as an open text is a crucial one, to which I will return in section II.3 below.

### ***Physiologies and flâneurs***

Prior to this twentieth-century theorization, the idea of the city as a cryptic document to be read and interpreted was underlined in the nineteenth century by the recurrent figure of the *flâneur*<sup>42</sup> and the concomitant vogue for panoramic literature and specifically the *physiologie*. Edmond Texier’s *Tableau de Paris* (1853), for example,

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<sup>40</sup> See also Barthes’s laudatory evaluation of Lynch’s work: ‘en bon sémanticien, il a le sens des *unités discrètes* : il a essayé de retrouver dans l’espace urbain les unités discontinues qui, toutes proportions gardées, ressembleraient un peu à des phonèmes et à des sémantèmes. Ces unités, il les appelle chemins, clôtures, quartiers, nœuds, points de référence. Ce sont des catégories qui pourraient facilement devenir des catégories sémantiques’ (Barthes 1967: 440). On this important work by Lynch, see also Choay 1965: 72-3 and Soucy 1971: 5.

<sup>41</sup> Lynch uses the terms ‘imageability’ and ‘visibility’ to mean the same thing, and acknowledges that Stern (1914-5: 165-72) uses the term ‘apparency’ (Lynch 1960: 9-10).

<sup>42</sup> See Benjamin 1999: 416-55, Gill 2009: 72-3 and, on Alfred Kazin’s notion of ‘literary *flânerie*, the construction of the city as an aesthetic object’ (1991: 139), Prendergast (1992: 4).



viewed architecture as a system of meaning, ‘a richly meaningful text when scrutinized by the specialist’ (Burton 1994: 3) and even Balzac contributed to the genre, with his *Histoire et physiologie des boulevards de Paris* (Prendergast 1992: 102-3).

Prendergast writes that:

The notion of *physionomie*, travelling via adaptations of Lavater’s theories to social description, produced the *physiologie* (the more common title of the genre in the nineteenth century), devoted to ‘reading’ the city in the same way that Lavater interpreted faces. (1992: 185)<sup>43</sup>

The premise behind the *physiologie* was a reassuring one: ‘The city is there to be ‘read’, often in the form of reading essences, fixed identities, into contingent particulars (of place, speech, dress, etc.)’ (Prendergast 1992: 2).<sup>44</sup> Description, classification, cataloguing and linguistic circumscription were used to ‘make readable’ various puzzling, and therefore threatening, urban phenomena, helping ‘anxious readers to decode and master the city’s mutating inhabitants and institutions’ (Gill 2009: 8).<sup>45</sup> Taxonomical control was the next best thing to genuine mastery, facilitating a reassuring demystification of the unsettling elements of city life. In *Les Mystères de Paris*, for example, Sue introduces his fictional world ‘as the equivalent of a human zoo’ (Prendergast 1992: 87):

Nous allons essayer de mettre sous les yeux du lecteur quelques épisodes de la vie d’autres barbares aussi en dehors de la civilisation que les sauvages peuplades si bien peintes par Cooper.

Seulement les barbares dont nous parlons sont au milieu de nous [...]

Ces hommes ont des mœurs à eux, des femmes à eux, un langage à eux, langage mystérieux, rempli d’images funestes, de métaphores dégoûtantes de sang. (MP: 31)

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<sup>43</sup> Prendergast here refers the reader to Sieburth 1985: 47 (and 1984). On the city as a sexualized body, see IV.3.

<sup>44</sup> See also Gill 2009: 44-7.

<sup>45</sup> See also Gill 2009: 73.

Thus, however frightening and repugnant the ‘barbares’ will prove, this pseudo-scientific classification of them gives the reader an assuasive impression of control.

At the same time, the assumption of legibility behind the *physiologie* could pull in the opposite direction, encouraging a sense of mystery. As Burton remarks, ‘All *physionomies* assume the existence of hieroglyphic ‘correspondences’ between outward forms and inner realities, correspondences that only the initiated can decipher’ (1994: 4). Thus in *Les Mystères de Paris*, Rodolphe’s ability to ‘read’ characters and situations from all walks of city life is underlined by his literacy, which distinguishes him from most of the other characters. If he is Madame Pipelet’s ‘roi des locataires’, this is not least because he reads her letters to her. Illiterate characters are at a considerable disadvantage in the urban environment:

qu'un pauvre misérable, autant par besoin que par stupidité, contrainte ou ignorance des lois qu'il ne sait pas lire, achète sciemment une guenille provenant d'un vol... il ira vingt ans aux galères comme receleur, si le voleur va vingt ans aux galères. (MP: 527, my emphasis)

And even supposedly ‘literate’ characters are fooled by ‘equivocal signs’.<sup>46</sup> Thus we are told how Rodolphe succumbed to the exquisitely beautiful Sarah Mac-Gregor, whose attractive appearance belied her selfishness and ruthless ambition: ‘Au physique, son organisation mentait aussi perfidement qu’au moral’ (MP: 241).

Other characters deliberately exploit the difficulties and confusions associated with reading, to further their own sinister projects. The city is ‘a centre of learning, good manners, civilization, culture’ and yet also ‘the university of adversity and false values’ (Prendergast 1992: 29). As such, education and erudition often disguise dishonesty and corruption, as is the case with *notaire* Jacques Ferrand and

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<sup>46</sup> See Gill 2009: 112-4.

Polidori/Bradamanti. The young Rodolphe's unease at the prospect of abandoning his bracing outdoor pursuits for a life of books and learning is premonitory:

Rodolphe, abandonnant avec un extrême regret la vie indépendante, animée, qu'il avait menée jusqu'alors auprès de Murph, pour aller pâlir sur des livres et se soumettre aux cérémonieux usages de la cour de son père, prit d'abord l'abbé en aversion. [...] Rodolphe commença par déclarer à Polidori qu'il ne se sentait aucune vocation pour l'étude, qu'il avait avant tout besoin d'exercer ses bras et ses jambes, de respirer l'air des champs, de courir les bois et les montagnes ; un bon fusil et un bon cheval lui semblant d'ailleurs préférables aux plus beaux livres de la terre. (MP: 246)

Polidori's multiple names, and the confusion with regard to his identity these create, underline the limitations of linguistic circumscription. Such characters play on the problematic nature of reading in various other ways, distorting and intercepting communications<sup>47</sup> and exploiting the potential for the misreading of situations at every turn.

The assumption of urban legibility behind the *physiologie*, and the possibility of challenging that assumption, thus made possible an alternation between demystification and re-mystification already noted in section II.1 above, and to which I will return again in considering the specificity of the city-text analogy in the *mystères urbains*.

Much academic interest, particularly since Benjamin, has centred on the *flâneur* as the exemplary interpreter of urban life (Gill 2009: 72). The *flâneur*'s engagement with the city is clearly akin to the reader's engagement with the text, as Burton explains:

In his pre-1850 form, the *flâneur* is first and foremost a 'reader' of urban life. 'Tout est pour lui un texte d'observations', wrote *le Livre des cent-et-un*,<sup>48</sup> but, as de Lacroix implied in his contrast between *badaud* and *flâneur*, that

<sup>47</sup> On instances of epistolary mystification in Balzac's *Mystères de province* and Zybienn's *Mystères de Nice*, see IV.3 below.

<sup>48</sup> Burton refers to 'Le flâneur à Paris' (Anon 1832: 101).

text was ‘hieroglyphic’ in character, complex, arcane and polysemic, and required a specialized and abnormally acute reader – a Champollion of the city – to decipher its multiple meanings. The *flâneur* is that reader; he alone can interpret and understand the cryptic utterances of ‘ce sphinx qu’on appelle Paris’,<sup>49</sup> and to this task he devotes, quite simply, every instant of his waking life. For the *flâneur*, Parisian life is before all else a *system of signs* in which even the most trivial phenomenon is replete with meaning, and, if ‘read’ correctly and linked to other perhaps widely disparate phenomena, will disclose a universe of significance. (1994: 2)

While Shields also acknowledges ‘the importance of the *flâneur* as a surrogate figure for the reader’ (1994: 67),<sup>50</sup> it is important to note that the *flâneur* can also be seen as representative of the writer, ‘the indulgent fantasy of *the writer not writing* but whose observing eye nonetheless transmits directly to the novelist’s page’ (Shields 1994: 64).<sup>51</sup>

This equivalence of reading and writing, embodied in the *flâneur*,<sup>52</sup> reminds us of Barthes’s theory of the text<sup>53</sup> and his idea of an open-ended, ‘writerly’ text in particular (1970), as well as Iser’s theory of reader response (1978).<sup>54</sup> The city, for Lynch, much like the text for Barthes and Iser, is as much a product of its perception as a pre-existing entity (1960: 3).<sup>55</sup>

The observer himself should play an active role in perceiving the world and have a creative part in developing his image. He should have the power to change that image to fit changing needs. An environment which is ordered in precise and final details may inhibit new patterns of activity. A landscape whose every rock tells a story may make difficult the creation of fresh stories. [...] what we seek is not a final but an open-ended chapter, capable of continuous further development.

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<sup>49</sup> Delvau 1862: 9.

<sup>50</sup> See also Shields 1991.

<sup>51</sup> The notion is concretized by the image of a destitute Baudelaire forced to compose his poetry while walking, ‘*Trébuchant sur les mots comme sur les pavés*’ (Shields 1994: 64).

<sup>52</sup> Note, however, the difference between the active, engaged *flâneur* and the passive *badaud* (see Burton 1994: 1 and Prendergast 1992: 133-5).

<sup>53</sup> See Dillon 2007: 84 and II.3 below.

<sup>54</sup> See II.1 above.

<sup>55</sup> See also Barthes (on Lynch) 1967: 440.

[...] Environmental images are a result of a two-way process between the observer and his environment.<sup>56</sup> The environment suggests distinctions and relations, and the observer – with great adaptability and in the light of his own purposes – selects, organizes, and endows with meaning what he sees. [...] Thus the image of a given reality may vary significantly between different observers. (Lynch 1960: 6)

Lynch's description of his ideal city: 'plastic to the purposes and perceptions of its citizens' (1960: 91), whose 'rich, vivid images' are 'adaptable to changing practical needs' and facilitate the development of 'new groupings, new meanings, new poetry' (1960: 139) could easily be applied to the open text as described by Barthes and Iser. Barthes agrees that 'actuellement la sémiologie ne pose jamais l'existence d'un signifié définitif. Ce qui veut dire que les signifiés sont toujours des signifiants pour les autres, et réciproquement' (1967: 268-9) and goes on to make an explicit link between the open city and the open text himself:

n'importe quelle ville est une structure mais [...] il ne faut jamais chercher et [...] il ne faut jamais vouloir remplir cette structure.

Car la ville est un poème, [...] mais ce n'est pas un poème classique, un poème bien centré sur un sujet. C'est un poème qui déploie le signifiant, et c'est ce déploiement que finalement la sémiologie de la ville devrait essayer de saisir et de faire chanter. (1967 : 446)

Having established the clear theoretical parallels to be drawn between city and text, I will move on, now, to a consideration of the specific resonance of the city-text analogy in the *mystères urbains*.

### **The city as text and the *mystères urbains***

As Hamon points out, 'le mot "urbanisme", selon le *Dictionnaire Historique de la langue française* Robert, daterait de 1842, date aussi des *Mystères de Paris* [...]'

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<sup>56</sup> Lynch reiterates this point, which is strikingly close to Iser's reader-response theory, on several occasions, e.g. 1960: 11 and 131. See also Lynch 1960: 91 and 139.

(1994: 6). The parallels to be drawn between the two phenomena are numerous. Urbanism and popular fiction were both the subject of much political debate. Sue's *Mystères de Paris* was a landmark text in a process of literary democratization, and a democratization of urban space soon followed under Haussmann,<sup>57</sup> which would be continued by his successors under the Third Republic (Landau and Sainte Marie Gauthier 2000: 57).

Because of their respective political implications, the endeavours of both Sue and Haussmann were met with vigorous criticism<sup>58</sup> and significantly, a number of those who criticized Haussmann's reforms were writers:<sup>59</sup> 'Monotonie, gigantisme, platitude géométrique, absence de style : des frères Goncourt à Victor Hugo [...], les contemporains n'ont pas épargné leurs critiques à l'œuvre esthétique de Haussmann' (Choay 2000: 24).

Criticisms of both city and text have also undergone significant revisions since the period in question. As Choay notes with regard to the former: 'le Paris d'aujourd'hui, qui est presque entièrement son œuvre [à Haussmann], nous semble une des plus belles villes du monde et les immeubles haussmanniens sont maintenant protégés au titre des monuments historiques' (2000: 24-5). In much the same way, texts such as the *mystères urbains* now enjoy a level of academic interest which previously, as a result of canon-oriented approaches and corpuses, was denied them. Haussmann's holistic approach to the city, and his attempts to *décloisonner* (to de-compartmentalize, or open out) urban space, are significant in this respect, as the same, spatial terminology (*décloisonnement littéraire*) is used to describe a holistic approach to literature, encompassing both the 'literary' and the 'popular':

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<sup>57</sup> See Prendergast 1992: 171. On the democratization of urban space, parks in particular, as commented on by George Sand and Alphonse Karr, see Choay 2000: 15-6.

<sup>58</sup> On the various criticisms of Haussmann, see Choay 2000: 10 and 30.

<sup>59</sup> There are many examples of the crossover between architecture or urbanism and writing. On Le Corbusier's journalistic talents, for example, see Choay 1965: 33.

Pour la première fois, une ville existante est traitée comme une totalité, un ensemble dont les parties sont indissociables. Il s'agit non plus de lotir des terrains ou d'embellir des quartiers particuliers, mais de *décloisonner* la ville et de l'aménager dans son ensemble. (Choay 2000: 12, my emphasis)<sup>60</sup>

After Haussmann, a number of trends in urbanism showed similar concerns to those of commercial literature. Choay explores notions of the city as 'un objet reproductible' and 'un prototype industrialisable' (in rationalist architecture) (1965: 25 and 77), as well as discussing the standardization of architecture to reduce costs (1965: 38).

But if the political implications of urbanism have much in common with those of popular literature, it is the narrative elements of both which are perhaps even more striking. Haussmann appears to have lacked the agency evoked by Chesterton (see above), as his transformations of Paris produced a number of unwitting, unfortunate results, many of which served to confirm and consolidate a sense of confusion and mystery in the city, rather than resolving it. Though much derided by contemporary urbanists, these unexpected effects echoed a literary model which was just as fruitful as Haussmann's initiatives were flawed.

Préfet de la Seine under Napoléon III (1853-1870), Haussmann implemented a huge programme of urban developments in Paris,<sup>61</sup> in response to the industrial revolution and its various economic, social and cultural consequences (Choay 2000: 9). The arrival *en masse* of the rural population in Paris, creating an urban proletariat (Choay 2000: 22), meant that movement around the city, health, living conditions

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<sup>60</sup> On *transversalité* versus *cloisonnement*, see also Landau and Sainte Marie Gauthier 2000: 57.

<sup>61</sup> Haussmann was incredibly close to Napoleon, describing himself as the Emperor's 'serviteur', 'instrument' and, most significantly in the context of our city-text analogy, 'éditeur' [Haussmann 2000: 491] (Choay 2000: 27).

and security<sup>62</sup> were particularly topical issues. But many of Haussmann's wide-ranging transformations, which attempted to address these concerns, backfired:

Haussmann's objective was to produce a coherent and stratified identity for modern Paris (it is no accident that Haussmann provided Paris with its first accurate survey map), a clearly readable system of boundaries and demarcations with everything in its proper place, essentially a city without surprise.

Yet arguably he in fact presided over its opposite: the city as a place of increasing illegibility, in which 'surprise' seemed to be the order of the day, and in which 'identity', psychic and social, would come to be perceived as uncertain and problematical. (Prendergast 1992: 10)

Physical cleanliness and coherence could not resolve deep-seated social opacity and unpredictability:

paradoxically, the clearer, cleaner and more uniform the city came to appear physically, the more opaque and mysterious it came to seem socially, as governed by a contingent and chaotic play of forces, transactions and interests, to which one could not attach a correspondingly clear description. (Prendergast 1992: 11)<sup>63</sup>

Haussmann's error seems to have been in attempting to quash mystery altogether. Over-zealous planning and rationalization denied the mystery integral to the city and created, ironically, an even more perplexing version of it. As Prendergast remarks, 'planned and rationalized, the city paradoxically no longer seemed to possess coherent form' (1992: 11).<sup>64</sup>

As Lynch points out, elements of mystery or disorder can be extremely positive aspects of the urban environment, if only because they bring opposing elements, of order and connection, into sharper focus:

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<sup>62</sup> See Choay 2000: 11, 13 and 20.

<sup>63</sup> See also Prendergast 1992: 9.

<sup>64</sup> Benjamin, for example, saw rationalization initiatives such as house numbering as detrimental to the activity of *flânerie*, 'predicated' as it was 'on the possibility that there might be secrets to be imputed to things' (Tester 1994: 14).



It must be granted that there is some value in mystification, labyrinth, or surprise in the environment. Many of us enjoy the House of Mirrors, and there is a certain charm in the crooked streets of Boston.<sup>65</sup> This is so, however, only under two conditions. First, there must be no danger of losing basic form or orientation, of never coming out. The surprise must occur in an overall framework; the confusions must be small regions in a visible whole. Furthermore, the labyrinth or mystery must in itself have some form that can be explored and in time be apprehended. Complete chaos without a hint of connection is never pleasurable. (1960: 5-6)

What Haussmann had failed to realize was something to which the writers of the *mystères urbains* would be much more attuned: the balance required between mystification and demystification, order and disorder (already examined in II.1 above). This delicate equilibrium was the mark of both well-planned urban spaces and successful mystery narratives.

The *mystères urbains* use urban space as a constitutive part of the text, rather than a simple ‘setting’, to reinforce this alternation. In Sue, according to Sirvent: ‘Il ne s’agit pas simplement de créer une atmosphère ni d’instiller somme toute un ingrédient narratif ancillaire où la ville “sert de cadre” au récit. Mais de faire de la cité un “participant,” remplissant un “rôle actantiel”’ (2000: 87).<sup>66</sup> This role is two-fold: the illegible city is a source of mystery and disorder, and yet also the *antidote* to that disorder: the frighteningly amorphous nature of the city is offset by a reassuring spatiality, which structures, in turn, our engagements with a wide-ranging text. According to Genette, the creation of such an ‘espace-refuge’ is a standard reaction to a typically modern ‘angoisse’: ‘l’homme d’aujourd’hui [...] se rassure en projetant sa pensée sur les choses, en construisant des plans et des figures qui

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<sup>65</sup> Prendergast also refers to the importance of preserving mystery in the city: ‘Indecipherability is not [...] a problem to be tackled, in an effort, perhaps endlessly defeated but always renewed, to understand the city; on Deutsch’s view [1988: 17-18] (a view not unrepresentative of a certain brand of postmodernist taste in these matters), it is rather a condition to be welcomed, both condition and effect of high-speed existence become pure high’ (1992: 211-2).

<sup>66</sup> On the city as an integral part of the text, rather than a mere accessory, in Balzac and Dumas, see Meynard 2006: 44. On the city as a character, see James 2000b and Lavergne 2009: 185.

empruntent à l'espace des géomètres un peu de son assise et de sa stabilité' (1966: 101).

This is exemplified in *Les Mystères de Paris*, where the reader is invited to negotiate the narrative as he would the actual city, with Sue's rhetorical formulae (emphases in the examples below are mine) positing an equivalence between our navigation of the narrative and a series of physical displacements around the city:<sup>67</sup>

Avant d'apprendre au lecteur le dénouement du drame qui se passait dans le bateau à soupape de Martial, *nous reviendrons sur nos pas*. (MP: 851)

Plusieurs jours s'étaient passés depuis que Jacques Ferrand avait pris Cecily à son service.

*Nous conduirons le lecteur (qui connaît déjà ce lieu) dans l'étude du notaire à l'heure du déjeuner des clercs*. (MP: 921)

Pour comprendre cette première impression d'horreur et d'épouvante dont nous parlons, *que le lecteur nous suive dans la Fosse-aux-Lions*. (MP: 1010)

Conversely, Sue also makes full use of his descriptions of space ('à la fois attirant et dangereux, favorable et maléfique', according to Genette (1966: 102)) to upset and mystify the reader. This is achieved via the sheer variety of urban spaces which the reader is invited to explore. Meynard identifies the same tactic in Dumas:

les descriptions que Dumas donne de Paris obéissent parfaitement au grand principe du feuilleton : ne pas lasser le lecteur. D'abord il ne décrit pas n'importe quel lieu parisien. Ce sont souvent des scènes d'intérieur soigneusement choisies [...]. Ce sont, dans tous les cas, des lieux fortement chargés en symboles, destinés à toucher les lecteurs de tout âge et de tout sexe [...]; on trouve aussi des lieux qui font peur [...], qui répugnent et font palpiter [...], qui sont porteurs de mystère [...]. Ce sont enfin quelques-uns des lieux pittoresques et représentatifs de la capitale [...]: Paris festif ou besogneux; Paris mystérieux et morbide; Paris lieu de pouvoir où se décide la vie ou la mort d'un homme. (2006: 43)

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<sup>67</sup> According to Kenner, 'prose fiction consists of standard passages which the reader soon learns to negotiate as he does a familiar stairway' (1974: 14).

Thus, in *Les Mystères de Paris*, the reader is invited to tour prisons, hospitals and asylums (Appendix VIII.2.1). The private spaces to which the reader is granted access range from working-class hovels to opulent palaces, as shown in the examples below (again, the emphases are mine):

Quoique toujours obscurci par la hauteur des maisons, *le hideux quartier où le lecteur nous a suivi* semblait moins horrible, vu à la clarté d'un beau jour. (MP: 83)

On n'a peut-être pas oublié qu'une famille malheureuse dont le chef, ouvrier lapidaire, se nommait Morel, occupait la mansarde de la maison de la rue du Temple.

*Nous conduirons le lecteur dans ce triste logis.* (MP: 420)

*Maintenant nous conduirons le lecteur au palais de Gerolstein, habité par Fleur-de-Marie depuis son retour de France.* (MP: 1268)

The number and variety of diegetic locations echoes, *en abyme*, the number of texts we are dealing with, and reflects a preoccupation with excess and ephemera which is characteristic of the city. Prendergast remarks that '[t]he text, [...] like the city, [...] is given over to pointless excess, as productive capacity issuing in superfluity' (1992: 57), and notes a similar effect on the level of individual words:

The words are abundant but at the same time redundant. The text resembles its object which 'semble se dire après chaque œuvre finie : – A une autre !' A word or phrase is completed, and immediately another is produced, but the new term often does little to further meaning; it simply comes into being in order to be superseded, like the 'moisson d'hommes' of Paris, superfluous beings which nevertheless spring up again as soon as they are cut down. Paris, we are told, concerns itself with things that do not last. (1992: 57)

In this way, the interplay between mystification and demystification, order and disorder, which had become so important to the mystery narrative was not only played out in the city, but took the city, at once reassuring and unsettling, as its very model.

## Limitations

I will conclude this section by considering the limitations of this indubitably appealing metaphor. Kermode remarks that:

There seems to be a vogue for “space” in modern French criticism (“l’espace proustien,” etc.) and although the sense is quite different, the usage illustrates how notions of this kind can degenerate into jargon or become machines for effortless thinking. (1978: 588)

According to Mitchell (1980: 539-41), the problem stems from a confusion between the ‘literal and metaphoric, real and artificial’ (1980: 540); an inability to distinguish between the actual nature of the city and the ‘merely metaphoric’ (1980: 539) explanatory models mobilized to describe it: ‘An almost universal objection is that spatial form is a “mere metaphor” which has been given misplaced concreteness and that it denies the essentially temporal nature of literature’ (Mitchell 1980: 541).

Barthes also recognizes the limited nature of the city-text metaphor (1967: 265). For him, a genuine urban *sémiologie* is the only way out of this impasse. And yet the problems posed by any attempt at systematizing urban signs are manifold. Mounin (1970), for example, stresses the specificities of linguistics as a signifying system and criticizes the way in which the likes of Lévi-Strauss and Barthes begin with metaphorical comparisons of city and text and then ‘glisse[nt] insensiblement de la métaphore à l’identification’ (Soucy 1971: 5), without acknowledging the fundamental differences between urban and linguistic sign systems (Soucy 1971: 5-6). For Soucy, a valid system of urban signs, following the linguistic model, would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to devise (1971: 8).<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Choay also acknowledges ‘une irréductible différence de nature entre perception esthétique et perception de la ville’ (1965: 72) and bemoans the lack of ‘un système sémiologique global, à la fois ouvert et unifiant’ (78, emphasis in original).

As well as being questionable from a methodological point of view, the notion of urban legibility has also become something of a cliché (Schwartz 1998: 1-2).<sup>69</sup> This is not even particularly recent, as, according to Burton: ‘the belief that urban life consisted of a multiplicity of interlocking semiotic systems and that everything in the city was, by definition, meaningful was so widespread amongst writers on pre-1850 Paris as to be virtually platitudinous’ (1994: 2).

How, then, can I defend my use of what is arguably a tired metaphor, characterized by a dubious methodology? The main point to be made is that language and text were very much literal, and not merely figurative, phenomena in the nineteenth-century city. Hamon describes the variety and dominance of language and text in the city particularly well:

Pas de lieu qui ne soit parloir : de nouvelles parlures, fortement localisées, s’installent, liées à la ville, en littérature : l’argot des bas-fonds, la blague de l’atelier, le bon mot du boulevard, les rumeurs de la Bourse, le barbarisme des loges, le cliché du salon bourgeois, accompagnées d’une nouvelle sémiotique : les enseignes et la réclame, les slogans et les proclamations des “murailles révolutionnaires”, le “puff” et “l’immense nausée des affiches” (Baudelaire) qui envahissent les murs. (1994: 7)<sup>70</sup>

The city was not only linguistic and textual but, specifically, literary. As Tanner remarks:

The city and literature are coeval, certainly in the West. [...] The novel, indeed, is demonstrably a function, a production of the city. And there is little point in setting out to study, or to document, the city as ‘background’ or ‘setting’. (1992: viii)

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<sup>69</sup> See also Gill 2009: 72-3.

<sup>70</sup> See also Hamon 2001: 152 and 172. On advertising posters and newspaper kiosks, see Landau and Sainte Marie Gauthier 2000: 52 and 53.

The city was also, in many respects, first and foremost a literary invention.<sup>71</sup> Literature, rather than history, sociology or any other science-based discipline, was the obligatory channel through which the French (in ever-growing numbers, as literature underwent a process of democratization) engaged with urban space. Tanner evokes this idea of the city as a literary creation, asserting that ‘the city cannot be ‘read’ until it has been ‘written’ (1992: viii) and refers to ‘a ‘Paris’ [...] inflected by books about Paris’ (1992: 186).<sup>72</sup> The notion of the city as a literary commodity is also evoked by Mumford, who ‘argued that writing is the city’s ‘stigmata’, that, because of writing and the circulation of fictions, ‘life as recorded’ tends to take over from ‘life as lived’, in the mode of ‘overdramatisation, illusory inflation and deliberate falsification’ (Prendergast 1992: 196).<sup>73</sup> Hamon makes the same point, referring to the city as ‘[une] histoire de médiations’, which means that ‘on ne “voit” peut-être la ville “réelle” contemporaine qu’à travers la description littéraire d’états passés de la ville’ (1994: 5).

The equivalence between city and text must not, therefore, be dismissed as a contrivance. The city is not a text merely because we have decided to impose that particular *grille de lecture* upon it, conveniently turning a blind eye to the methodological question marks hanging over the urban semiotics propounded by the likes of Barthes. In fact, the nineteenth-century city was unmistakably textual and literary and the explanatory model of the city as text, rather than being ‘mere metaphor’, must be seen as a direct result of this. This crucial image of the city, as

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<sup>71</sup> See also Hamon 1994: 6.

<sup>72</sup> See also Prendergast on Benjamin (1999), according to whom ‘the *flâneur*’s exploration of the city often went by way of a massive textual relay (‘an almost infinite number of works’), and [...] what he saw and felt during his late-afternoon stroll, how he ‘constructed’ the city, was substantially affected by what he read in the morning’ (1992: 196).

<sup>73</sup> Prendergast refers here to Mumford (1961: 97).

not only a text, but one which is continually rewritten, brings me to my final contextual section, in which I consider the palimpsest trope.





### II.3 – THE PALIMPSEST TROPE

In the final section of this chapter, I trace the evolution of the palimpsest, which was originally a palaeographic phenomenon (Dillon 2007: 11), but has subsequently emerged as a fruitful metaphor used to define any cultural artefact that has been reused but still bears traces of its earlier form. I examine the palimpsest as a metaphor for hypertextuality, as well as acknowledging the potential methodological pitfalls associated with ‘palimpsestuous’<sup>74</sup> readings. I explain the particular pertinence of the palimpsest trope to popular fiction, and to the *mystères urbains* specifically, drawing on the city-text analogy explored in section II.2 above, before outlining my use of the trope as a methodological tool and structuring principle for this research project.

#### **The palaeographic palimpsest**

The palimpsest can be traced back to the Egyptian era of the third century BC (Dillon 2007: 13), when manuscripts were commonly reused and their original text overwritten. De Quincey writes that ‘A palimpsest [...] is a membrane or roll cleansed of its manuscript by reiterated successions’ (1998 [1845]: 139). He is not alone in emphasizing the processes of erasure and destruction. The Oxford English Dictionary definition evokes: ‘a parchment or other writing-material written upon twice, the original writing having been erased or rubbed out to make place for the second manuscript in which a later writing is written over an effaced earlier writing’ (Dillon 2007: 11-12).

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<sup>74</sup> The adjective was coined by Philippe Lejeune in his Barthesian pastiche entitled ‘Le Roland Barthes sans peine’ (1984). See Dillon 2007: 4 and Genette 1982: 557. Note the distinction made by Dillon between ‘palimpsestic’, which ‘refers to the process of layering that produces a palimpsest’, and ‘palimpsestuous’, which ‘describes the structure that one is presented with as a result of that process’ (2007: 4).

What these definitions neglect to acknowledge, as Dillon points out, is the inherent ambiguity of the palimpsest. In Dillon's words, the procedure had a 'paradoxically preservatory power' in that 'although the first writing on the vellum *seemed* to have been eradicated after treatment, it was often imperfectly erased' (2007: 12). Dillon uses the example of the Archimedes Palimpsest, 'the most famous and important contemporary example of a palimpsest' (2007: 11) to illustrate her point. The document, sold at auction for two million dollars in 1998, is a Greek liturgical book, thought to date from the late 12th or early 13th century. But the terrific value of the manuscript comes from the underlying text, a uniquely important manuscript of Archimedes, with tremendous implications for the history of Greek mathematics and engineering, paradoxically preserved for posterity (Dillon 2007: 11-2).<sup>75</sup>

Just as attempted suppression frequently and paradoxically results in conservation and preservation (Dillon 2007: 41), or even a positive 'reactivation' of the underlying layers of palimpsest (Dillon 2007: 112), so the process of destruction can be simultaneously one of creation (Dillon 2007: 111). '[S]uperimposition' (Dillon 2007: 52), is as much a 'productive creativity' (Dillon 2007: 54) as an act of erasure.

Given the tantalizingly incongruous marriage of the notions of erasure, destruction and suppression to those of superimposition, preservation and creation, which is integral to the palimpsest, it is hardly surprising that it soon evolved into a figurative, interdisciplinary concept,<sup>76</sup> and one which has been a source of ongoing fascination in many areas of cultural studies.

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<sup>75</sup> See <http://www.archimedespalimpsest.org/>

<sup>76</sup> Appropriately, this new, figurative concept is itself the result of a palimpsestuous process: 'the concept of the palimpsest – which is at play in literary, critical and theoretical discourse subsequent to

### The palimpsest as a metaphor for hypertextuality

Genette's *Palimpsestes* (1982) is perhaps the most well-known application of the palimpsest trope to the field of literary theory. Genette uses the notion of the palimpsest to explore hypertextuality:

Cette duplicité d'objet, dans l'ordre des relations textuelles, peut se figurer par la vieille image du *palimpseste*, où l'on voit, sur le même parchemin, un texte se superposer à un autre qu'il ne dissimule pas tout à fait, mais qu'il laisse voir par transparence. (1982: 556)

He describes hypertextuality as one of five types of transtextual relationship (the others being intertextuality, paratextuality, metatextuality and architextuality) and specifically as 'toute relation unissant un texte B (que j'appellerai *hypertexte*) à un texte antérieur A (que j'appellerai, bien sûr, *hypotexte*) sur lequel il se greffe d'une manière qui n'est pas celle du commentaire' (1982: 13).

Hypertextual practices can be categorized according to structural (relational) criteria: parody, travesty and transposition are examples of *transformation*,<sup>77</sup> while pastiche, caricature and forgery are examples of *imitation*.<sup>78</sup> Practices can also be categorized according to functional criteria: parody and pastiche are 'ludic', travesty and caricature 'satiric', and transposition and forgery 'serious'.

But however the various practices are grouped, what is important is the inevitable change of meaning which results from any hypertextual endeavour. As Genette insists, 'il n'existe pas de transposition *innocente* – je veux dire : qui ne modifie d'une manière ou d'une autre la signification de son hypotexte' (1982: 417, emphasis in original); 'il n'y a pas de transformation innocente, pas même la mieux

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De Quincey – is a philosophical concept that has emerged from an erasure of its 'literal' or 'proper' meaning' (Dillon 2007: 54).

<sup>77</sup> Genette also calls this simple, direct transformation (1982: 14).

<sup>78</sup> Genette also uses the term indirect transformation (1982: 16).

intentionnée, et [...] on ne peut toucher à la lettre d'un texte – a fortiori à son action – sans toucher à son sens' (1982: 448). As such, acknowledging and interrogating hypertextuality is always a fruitful exercise: 'L'hypertexte *gagne* donc toujours [...] à la perception de son être hypertextuel' (1982: 555, emphasis in original).

The palimpsest is also important in terms of our evolving understanding of the hermeneutic quest (discussed in II.2 above), the places in which we seek to locate 'mystery' and the methods we employ in order to do so. Dillon explains how Barthes, in 'Texte (théorie du)' (1973b) describes 'a perceptual shift in relation to the text as palimpsest' (2007: 82). Barthes begins by explaining how traditional interpretative criticism 'cherche à démontrer que le texte possède un signifié global et secret'. The text is treated 'comme s'il était dépositaire d'une signification objective, et cette signification apparaît comme embaumée dans l'œuvre-produit' (1973b: 1682). Structuralist criticism therefore views the text as a layered palimpsest containing a hidden meaning, which the reader must retrieve and restore in order to interpret the text (Dillon 2007: 82-3).

In poststructuralist criticism,<sup>79</sup> however, the text as palimpsest is 'no longer regarded as a layered phenomenon in which the hidden text is of the only significance' (Dillon 2007: 82). Rather than dissecting the palimpsest to uncover and separate the hidden text, poststructuralists seek to acknowledge 'the interrelatedness of the texts on the palimpsest's surface' (Dillon 2007: 83).

The text thus becomes 'un espace polysémique, où s'entrecroisent plusieurs sens possibles' (Barthes 1973b: 1682), 'a surface phenomenon in which two or more

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<sup>79</sup> Genette uses the term *structuralisme ouvert*: 'Car il y a, dans ce domaine, deux structuralismes, l'un de la clôture du texte et du déchiffrement des structures internes [...]. L'autre structuralisme, c'est [...] celui [...] où l'on voit comment un texte [...] peut – si l'on veut bien l'y aider – « en lire un autre »' (1982: 557).

texts are inextricably tangled and intertwined' (Dillon 2007: 83).<sup>80</sup> We have clearly arrived at Barthes's understanding of the text as *tissu*:

Dans l'écriture multiple, [...] tout est à *démêler*, mais rien n'est à déchiffrer ; la structure peut être suivie, « filée » (comme on dit d'une maille de bas qui part) en toutes ses reprises et à tous ses étages, mais il n'y a pas de fond ; l'espace de l'écriture est à parcourir, il n'est pas à percer. (1968: 147)<sup>81</sup>

Barthes reiterates this new conception of the text in *Le Plaisir du texte*:

*Texte* veut dire *Tissu* ; mais alors que jusqu'ici on a toujours pris ce tissu pour un produit, un voile tout fait, derrière lequel se tient, plus ou moins caché, le sens (la vérité), nous accentuons maintenant, dans le tissu, l'idée générative que le texte se fait, se travaille à travers un entrelacs perpétuel ; perdu dans ce tissu – cette texture – le sujet s'y défait, telle une araignée qui se dissoudrait elle-même dans les sécrétions constructives de sa toile. Si nous aimions les néologismes, nous pourrions définir la théorie du texte comme une *hyphologie* (*hyphos*, c'est le tissu et la toile d'araignée). (1973a: 85-6)<sup>82</sup>

Our new focus of interest is not the meaning supposedly hidden behind Barthes's 'voile', but rather the veil itself, whose very texture, 'dans l'entrelacs des codes, des formules, des signifiants' (1973b: 1684) is constitutive of meaning (Dillon 2007: 83).

This shift of interest becomes something of a diegetic motif in the *mystères*. References to unveiling or raising the theatrical curtain abound. The opening chapter of Dumas's *Mohicans de Paris*, for example, is tantalizingly entitled 'DANS LEQUEL L'AUTEUR LÈVE LE RIDEAU SUR LE THÉÂTRE OÙ VA SE JOUER SON DRAME' (MOHI: 9).<sup>83</sup> And yet the prospect of depth is an illusion in the *mystères*, which amounts to little more than 'une gesticulation à vide' (Letourneux

<sup>80</sup> See also Derrida's 'Survivre' (2003).

<sup>81</sup> On the eroticization of city and text in general, and invitations to 'percer' or 'pénétrer' the mysteries of a feminized city in particular, see IV.3.

<sup>82</sup> See also 1973b: 1683.

<sup>83</sup> On theatrical metaphors, see also VI.2 below.

2007). The veil itself, along with the sensational unveiling gesture which accompanies it, is of more substance than the thing supposedly being revealed to us:

cette initiation est problématique dans la mesure où le basculement dans un monde de nuit et de mort (celui des catacombes et des bas-fonds), loin de préparer à la révélation d'un savoir ésotérique, constitue *la totalité* de ce savoir ésotérique : ce qu'il s'agit de découvrir, c'est que la ville véritable est faite de nuit, autrement dit, que l'espace intermédiaire nocturne [...] constitue en lui-même ce monde auquel il s'agit d'initier. [...] : ce qu'on découvre, c'est qu'il y a de l'obscurité. (Letourneux 2007, emphasis in original)

We are inevitably reminded of the deceptiveness of the palimpsest which, as McDonagh perceptively observes, 'feigns a sense of depth while always in fact functioning on the surface level' (1987: 211).<sup>84</sup>

To return to the city-text analogy, a similar shift of focus can be seen in the diegeses of the *mystères*. As if to pre-empt the theoretical shift explained above, the mysteries of the city, hitherto hidden away in the *bas-fonds*, are increasingly played out 'above ground', as Lavergne explains:

Selon Roger Caillois, la ville forme dans un premier temps un décor façade qui cache le monde réel, le monde d'en dessous. Puis, un glissement s'opère : le Paris des apparences et le Paris des mystères, qui coexistaient sans se confondre, se mêlent. D'abord cantonné dans les domaines de la nuit et des quartiers périphériques, le Paris des mystères gagne peu à peu la pleine lumière et le cœur de la cité. (2009: 191-2)<sup>85</sup>

Our interest is displaced from the underbelly of the city to its surface level, the new focus of mystery and complexity, much like the surface level of the text, where what were previously reassuringly distinct categories become, like the texts of the palimpsest, ever more difficult to differentiate and disentangle. The following extract from Zaccone's *Nuits de Paris* sums up the resulting situation particularly well:

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<sup>84</sup> See also Dillon 2007: 3.

<sup>85</sup> Lavergne's reference is to Caillois 1938: 188-91.

Paris est la ville des contrastes : il n'y a plus de classes, ni industries localisées : le pauvre coudoie le riche, l'uniformité extérieure des maisons cache les inégalités des positions sociales et, du rez-de chaussée au faite de ces demeures splendides que les nouvelles voies ont fait sortir du sol, vous trouvez toutes les classes, tous les luxes, toutes les misères. (NUITS: 168)

The revised figuration of the text as palimpsest therefore has important diegetic as well as hermeneutic implications.

### Potential pitfalls

The palimpsest, though undoubtedly a compelling trope, is not without its limitations, however. Before explaining my use of the trope in this study, I will attempt to address, and thereby avoid, a number of potential pitfalls associated with it.

Perhaps the first point to be made is the danger of placing undue emphasis on *Les Mystères de Paris* as hypotext. It is important to acknowledge that Sue's text had its own precursors, such as Restif de la Bretonne's *Nuits de Paris* and Louis Sébastien Mercier's *Tableau de Paris* (Bretonne and Mercier 1990),<sup>86</sup> just as the transformations inspired by *Les Mystères de Paris* often acquired the dual status of both hypertexts, based on Sue's novel, and hypotexts, inspiring a new generation of transformations.

In terms of the types of transformation I have chosen to analyse, and the corpus texts I have selected to exemplify these, we should note Genette's comment

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<sup>86</sup> De Groot acknowledges a similar danger in his study of Walter Scott: 'Scott [...] was merely developing the novel's fascination with history, as many critics have pointed out. Similarly, he was concretising in novel form something that had been a mainstay of other types of literary production for centuries' (2010: 11-2); 'Scott himself has his antecedents, and we should be careful before ascribing him an originary role that we are not simply imposing a literary history or suggesting that he departed from his forebears significantly' (2010: 17-8).

that hypertexts rarely fit neatly into one single category, but more usually combine elements of several different types of transformation:

à quelques exceptions près, toutes les transpositions singulières (toutes les *œuvres* transpositionnelles) relèvent à la fois de plusieurs de ces opérations, et ne se laissent ramener à l'une d'elles qu'à titre de caractéristique dominante, et par complaisance envers les nécessités de l'analyse et commodités de la disposition. [...] Il ne s'agit donc pas ici d'une classification des pratiques transpositionnelles, où chaque individu, comme dans les taxinomies des sciences naturelles, viendrait nécessairement s'inscrire dans un groupe et un seul [...]. (1982: 292, emphasis in original)

The assignation of my corpus texts to single categories stems from a desire to give a coherent structure to the presentation of my findings, rather than from a misconception as to the discrete nature of the categories. Instances of corpus texts displaying characteristics of more than one type of hypertextual transformation are acknowledged accordingly, and transformations of transformations are common. Féval's theatre adaptation of his *Les Mystères de Londres*, for example, (discussed in VI.1) is based on what was originally a geographical transposition of Sue's novel.

Potentially more problematic is the question Genette raises about the category of hypertextuality itself. He stresses that 'il ne faut pas considérer les cinq types de transtextualité comme des classes étanches, sans communication ni recoupements réciproques. Leurs relations sont au contraire nombreuses, et souvent décisives' (1982: 16). As such, 'hypertextuality is to be understood as an aspect of textuality, not just as a category of texts' (Dillon 2007: 89). Considering hypertextuality in isolation could therefore be a dangerously reductive tactic. This is one of the main reasons for my inclusion of a chapter considering the relationship between paratextuality and hypertextuality (III).

The universal nature of hypertextuality also has implications for the critical response to it:



[...] toutes les œuvres sont hypertextuelles. Mais, comme les égaux d'Orwell, certaines le sont plus (ou plus manifestement, massivement et explicitement) que d'autres [...]. Moins l'hypertextualité d'une œuvre est massive et déclarée, plus son analyse dépend d'un jugement constitutif, voire d'une décision interprétative du lecteur. (Genette 1982: 18)<sup>87</sup>

As Genette suggests, reading a text with its hypertextuality in mind makes objectivity difficult, and the less obvious the hypertextuality, the greater the scope for subjective interference. Interpretation thus ends up adding a new layer to the palimpsest rather than satisfactorily disentangling the elements already present:

palimpsestuous reading is [necessarily] an inventive process of creating relations where there may, or should, be none. As such, it always runs the risk of being false or fictitious. [...] palimpsestuous reading is also a process of 'imping', of extending, lengthening, enlarging and adding to the palimpsest one is writing on. Since in the process of reading the reader adds yet another text to the palimpsest's involuted surface. (Dillon 2007: 83)<sup>88</sup>

A palimpsestuous reading is also, inevitably, a re-reading, the text having been read initially 'pour lui-même' and then a second time 'dans sa relation à son hypotexte' (Genette 1982 : 555).<sup>89</sup> Re-reading is an activity associated with the literary critic,<sup>90</sup> but certainly not with the reader of popular literature, who is expected to discard his text having finished reading it. A methodology emphasizing hypertextuality could, in this respect, be seen as something of an incongruous and artificial approach to popular literature.

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<sup>87</sup> See also Dillon 2007: 90.

<sup>88</sup> While this can be a creative addition, it can also prove destructive. We are reminded of the pioneering, but ultimately damaging, techniques used by nineteenth-century palimpsest editors: 'Despite their initial success, the chemical methods employed by [Cardinal Angelo] Mai and others proved to have long-lasting and irreparably damaging effects on the parchments treated. Such methods often blackened the surface of the parchment, rendering both the upper and lower levels illegible, and hindered the effectiveness of later, more advanced, methods of resurrection' (Dillon 2007: 20). On the overlap of reading and writing processes, see also II.1 above and IV.3 below.

<sup>89</sup> Discussing Tournier's *Vendredi ou la vie sauvage*, Genette refers to a 'lecteur imprévu et sans doute importun [qui] vient alors se superposer au destinataire recherché, et cette double « réception », par elle-même, dessine ce qu'on pourrait décrire comme un palimpseste de lecture' (1982: 523).

<sup>90</sup> See Iser 1978: 149.

And yet Dillon's 'inventive process of creating relations' also highlights the fact that there is an interesting commercial, opportunistic dimension to hypertextuality. Genette warns against basing corpus selections on precarious hypertextual links: 'je puis décider que les *Confessions* de Rousseau sont un remake actualisé de celles de saint Augustin, et que leur titre en est l'indice contractuel – après quoi les confirmations de détail ne manqueront pas, simple affaire d'ingéniosité critique. [...]' (1982: 18).

This is certainly a pitfall to consider carefully with regard to my own corpus, many of whose titles are clearly modelled on that of Sue. In defence of my corpus, I would argue that its relatively restricted time period (certainly in comparison to the fourteen-century gap between the two *Confessions* evoked by Genette) points to a rather less disputable degree of hypertextuality. While the titles calqued on Sue's model were certainly indicative of a certain commercial opportunism, this is in itself an important aspect of hypertextuality, and one we cannot afford to ignore, particularly given my attempts to reject the traditional literary/popular categories. Making a distinction between the practical or socio-cultural and the aesthetic functions of 'serious' hypertextual practices, Genette says of the former:

c'est très évidemment celle qui domine dans des pratiques comme le résumé descriptif, la traduction, la mise en prose ; elle est encore très forte dans le *digest*, les diverses formes de transmodalisation comme l'adaptation théâtrale ou cinématographique, et dans la plupart des suites et des continuations. Elle répond à une demande sociale, et s'efforce légitimement de tirer de ce service un profit – d'où son aspect souvent commercial ou, comme on disait autrefois, « alimentaire » : souvent plus proche, disait Veblen, de la besogne que de l'exploit. (1982: 551)

Commercially-motivated transformations, therefore, even if they are weak, questionable or contrived from an aesthetic point of view, perhaps provide the most quintessential examples of hypertextuality. With this in mind, I now wish to consider

the particular pertinence of the palimpsest trope to popular fiction in general, and to the *mystères urbains* in particular, before outlining how it will be applied to this study.

### **The palimpsest and the *mystères urbains***

Dillon explains that the number of palimpsests decreased with the mechanization and popularization of literary production:

It is more likely that the high periods of palimpsest production are due to a combination of the general scarcity and expense of writing-material – both papyrus and vellum – and the increased demand for new books, both liturgical and other. [...] The practice of palimpsesting only ceased towards the end of the fifteenth century when the increased availability of paper and the invention of printing rendered the production of manuscripts by handwritten copying obsolete. (2007: 13)

But while the increased availability of writing materials and the invention of printing heralded the decline of handwritten palimpsests, the very same developments helped to highlight the countless possibilities of hypertextual transformations and to facilitate their realization.

Speculation as to how manuscripts were selected to be ‘erased’ in the earlier period raises familiar questions about the value of the literature involved. As Russell puts it:

not only is it plain that the MSS. of these works must have been incomplete before their defacement, but it is even highly probable that, in most cases, the original parchments must have been mere refuse, made up of scraps of imperfect copies of ancient writers already thrown aside by reason of their incompleteness. (1867: 103-4)<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> See also Dillon 2007: 15-6.

Popular fiction has always had a very similar association with obsolescence, wear, erasure and obliteration:

J. Dubois [1992] associe cette littérature [le roman policier] de la circonstance, du fait divers, vouée à “l’obsolescence”, à la “rapidité d’usage et d’usure” de son écriture et de sa consommation, littérature qui ne laisse guère de “traces” [...] Littérature de masse qui représente la masse ; littérature vouée à l’effacement qui représente l’effacement comme si le contenu avait toujours une connotation métagénérique. (Sirvent 2000: 82)

But Genette seems eager to put a positive spin on hypertextuality, or at least its end product, and this perhaps goes some way to explaining the renewed academic interest in popular fiction which followed a long period of academic activity focusing exclusively on traditional, canonical texts:

l’art de « faire du neuf avec du vieux » a l’avantage de produire des objets plus complexes et plus savoureux que les produits « faits exprès » : une fonction nouvelle se superpose et s’enchevêtre à une structure ancienne, et la dissonance entre ces deux éléments coprésents donne sa saveur à l’ensemble. (1982: 556)

What, then, of the particular relevance of the palimpsest to the *mystères urbains*? Both phenomena seem to have captured the popular imagination at around the same time. Dillon points out that ‘[w]hereas the peak period of palimpsesting took place from the seventh to the ninth centuries, the peak period of palimpsest discoveries occurred during the nineteenth century’ (2007: 16) and Genette makes a clear link between hypertextuality and modernity.<sup>92</sup> Fascination with the figurative concept of the palimpsest was very much contemporaneous with Sue’s *Mystères de Paris* and the glut of urban mysteries which ensued. Thomas de Quincey’s article ‘The palimpsest’, in which the figurative concept was evoked for the first time, was

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<sup>92</sup> ‘[...] nous avons vu resurgir sous le Second Empire une attitude de badinage culturel dont la postérité n’est pas éteinte. Par-dessus l’époque du sérieux romantico-réaliste, l’hypertextualité est évidemment [...] un des traits par lesquels une certaine modernité, ou postmodernité, renoue avec une tradition « prémoderne »’ (Genette 1982: 553-4).

published in *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1845, just two years after the publication of Sue's novel.<sup>93</sup>

As well as a shared period of popularity, the palimpsest and the *mystères urbains* also shared a common imagery. Dillon makes repeated reference to the gothic imagery used in descriptions of the palimpsest, explaining that palimpsests embody 'the mystery of the secret, the miracle of resurrection and the thrill of detective discovery' (2007: 12-3). Her study of the palimpsest has frequent recourse to imagery of murder, violence and resurrection (2007: 26 and 33). She refers to 'the ghostly persistence of the underlying texts [...]' (2007: 19); the 'resurrective sorcery' evoked by Russell (1867) (2007: 19); 'pagan forces of magical reanimation' (2007: 26); and what De Quincey refers to as the 'modern magic' of palimpsest editors (1998: 143) (2007: 26).<sup>94</sup> This imagery is clearly reminiscent of the gothic mysteries evoked in section II.1 above. The idea of indelible traces is also important in crime narratives, which feature prominently in the *mystères*. To give just a few examples: 'Le sang laisse aux mains des assassins des taches [*sic*] ineffaçables'; 'Le crime une fois commis, il s'agissait [...] d'en faire disparaître les traces'; 'cette fatale demeure que le crime semblait avoir marquée d'un sceau ineffaçable' (NUITS: 14, 16 and 215).

The interdisciplinarity of the palimpsest, and particularly its potential as a lens through which to understand and interrogate urban space is, evidently, also important in the *mystères urbains*. For Dillon, the palimpsest is not just a literary

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<sup>93</sup> See Dillon 2007: 1 and 125.

<sup>94</sup> This is imagery so vivid that it has found its way into modern terminology associated with the palimpsest: 'A new method of resurrection known as 'multi-spectral imaging' is being employed. Fascinatingly, its name carries the ghostly imagery that has surrounded palimpsests since the mid-nineteenth century into the language of contemporary palimpsest technologies' (Dillon 2007: 21).

concept, but very much an interdisciplinary notion,<sup>95</sup> while Huyssen agrees that ‘[t]he desire for narratives of the past, for re-creations, re-readings, re-productions, seems boundless at every level of our culture’ (2003: 5). Genette touches on this interdisciplinarity, discussing ‘les pratiques d’art au second degré, ou *hyperartistiques*’ (1982: 536). While urging caution and stressing that each art form has its own specificities, Genette does acknowledge that similar ‘derivational practices’ can legitimately be applied to other areas of the arts:

On voit donc bien que les pratiques de dérivation ne sont nullement le privilège de la littérature, mais qu’elles se retrouvent aussi bien en musique et dans les arts plastiques, car ce qui est vrai en peinture l’est dans une large mesure en sculpture ou en architecture – on sait par exemple la part considérable, dans le paysage urbain, du pastiche architectural. (1982: 546)

Huyssen is one of a number of researchers to consider the urban palimpsest,<sup>96</sup> a particularly interesting idea in the context of this study:

The trope of the palimpsest is inherently literary and tied to writing, but it can also be fruitfully used to discuss configurations of urban spaces and their unfolding in time [...] literary techniques of reading historically, intertextually, constructively, and deconstructively at the same time can be woven into our understanding of urban spaces as lived spaces that shape collective imaginaries. (2003: 7)

While hypertextual transformations of Sue’s *Mystères de Paris* proliferated, the city which so fascinated Sue and those who sought to emulate him was becoming increasingly palimpsestuous itself. Haussmann’s much-criticized transformations of the city (1853-70) stimulated a tremendous sense of nostalgia among Parisians.

Huyssen refers to ‘[t]he Romantic lament about a world lost under the onslaught of

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<sup>95</sup> Indeed, as noted in my introduction, ‘the palimpsest becomes a *figure* for interdisciplinarity – for the productive violence of the involvement, entanglement, interruption and inhabitation of disciplines in and on each other’ (Dillon 2007: 2, my emphasis).

<sup>96</sup> On the notion of ‘*continuité*’ and ‘l’intégration du passé au projet urbanistique’ in Geddes, see Choay (1965: 60, 62 and 64). On urban/architectural palimpsests and continuity, see Lowenthal 1985: 57-60.

industrialization, urbanization and modernity' (2003: 2). Enclaves of the city thought to be lost or forgotten, but in fact coexisting alongside the more visible, modernized areas of Paris ('le Paris connu et fréquenté, que tout le monde peut voir' (NUITS: 170)) came to hold tremendous appeal for the popular imagination, as Zaccone's *Nuits de Paris* illustrates, evoking 'les derniers vestiges du vieux Paris que la cognée civilisatrice tend chaque jour à faire disparaître, mais qui subsistent encore et concourent à faire des nuits de Paris un tableau unique qui n'a d'équivalent dans aucun pays' (NUITS: 169).

Zaccone describes in particular detail 'La Cité Doré':

Il y a à l'extrémité de Paris, dans l'enceinte même de cette capitale du monde des arts, un coin obscur et ignoré qui semble à cette heure comme un dernier vestige des barbaries du Moyen âge et où campe encore aujourd'hui une tribu qui offre toutes les misères, tous les aspects pittoresques et saisissants des anciennes hordes de bohémiens.

C'est la *Cour des Miracles* du dix-neuvième siècle ! (NUITS: 104)

The palimpsestuous complexity of the city is echoed in descriptions of more private, organic spaces within the city, such as the comte de Compans's abandoned garden:

Les plates-bandes étaient envahies par des plantes parasites, hautes et drues autour des arbres. Les longs pavots avaient poussé partout avec une fécondité luxuriante et vivace, et étouffaient les autres végétaux sous leur tête crénelée. La mousse couvrait le tronc des arbres que le sécateur n'avait pas depuis longtemps émondés, l'herbe croissait en toute liberté dans les allées sablées, et les chemins tortueux disparaissaient sous une végétation désordonnée. (NUITS: 65-6)

Returning to the concept of the city as a text, the palimpsest trope becomes even more resonant. Tanner refers to the way in which:

great minds appropriate the man-made environment – make it over a second time lexically, turning it into a unique discursive space in which values and meanings can be created, celebrated, contested, transformed. These meanings and values – this discursive appropriation/creation of the city – are vital to all

city-dwellers, for, in a very real and important sense, we inhabit the city as it has been written and rewritten as well as the city as it has been built and rebuilt. (1992: viii-ix)

The city is not only a text, but one which is distinctly hypertextual, both already-written and rewritten, time and again:

Paris will be compared to many other cities in nineteenth-century literature – Athens, Rome, Venice, Baghdad, Babylon, Sodom and Gomorrah. But the most active literary image of this kind for Paris is ‘Paris’, that is, the Paris of previous narrative incarnations. (Prendergast 1992: 28)

This ‘Paris of previous narrative incarnations’ is akin to an abundantly fertile hypotext. It is, according to Balzac’s *Ferragus*, ‘la ville aux cent mille romans’ (Meynard 2006: 46-7; Prendergast 1978: 28 and 55), imbued with a boundless literary potential. As Meynard puts it, ‘Paris est *déjà* roman en soi, même si c’est un roman encore non-écrit. Chaque personne rencontrée est déjà un possible héros ; les lieux eux-mêmes racontent ou suggèrent des histoires’ (2006: 46). This limitless literary potency is perhaps best articulated in Dumas’s *Mohicans de Paris* where, in one of the opening scenes, Salvator counsels the aspiring writer Jean Robert, advising him to seek inspiration in life itself, and especially in the city:

Les romans, poète, c’est la société qui les fait ; cherchez dans votre tête, fouillez votre imagination, creusez votre cerveau, vous n’y trouverez [...] rien de pareil à ce que le hasard, la fatalité, la Providence noue et dénoue dans une nuit, dans une ville comme Paris ! (MOHI: 62)

Barthes pursues this idea to its vertiginous, Oulipian conclusion, comparing the city to a text replete with permutations and possibilities, awaiting actualization by the city-dweller/reader:

nous retrouvons [...] la vieille intuition de Victor Hugo : la ville est une écriture ; celui qui se déplace dans la ville, c’est-à-dire l’usager de la ville (ce



que nous sommes tous), est une sorte de lecteur qui, selon ses obligations et ses déplacements, prélève des fragments de l'énoncé pour les actualiser en secret. Quand nous nous déplaçons dans une ville, nous sommes tous dans la situation du lecteur des *100 000 milliards de poèmes* de Raymond Queneau, où l'on peut trouver un poème différent en changeant un seul vers ; à notre insu, nous sommes un peu ce lecteur d'avant-garde lorsque nous sommes dans une ville. (1967: 444)

The Paris which so fascinated Sue was, thus, inherently palimpsestuous, and it was in response to this that he produced *Les Mystères de Paris*, whose hypertextual potential would quickly prove to be quite remarkable.

This chapter has considered mystery, the city and the palimpsest, and both the resonance and reinscription of each notion in the *mystères urbains*. It would seem appropriate to end this section, and the chapter, with a brief outline of the chapters to follow. In Chapter III, I examine the hypertextual implications of paratexts in the *mystères urbains*, looking in particular at prefaces (III.1), footnotes (III.2) and illustrations (III.3). Chapter IV considers hypertextuality as it relates to issues of identity, looking in particular at the detective *au second degré* (IV.1), the role played by secret societies in the evolution of the *mystères* (IV.2), and the implications of rewriting gender roles (IV.3). The next chapter deals with diegetic transformations, or *transdiégétisations*, to use Genette's terminology. I consider *mystères* whose action takes place in American cities (V.1), as well as those defined by the temporal settings to which their action has been transposed, namely the Renaissance (V.2) and an indeterminate future (V.3). Chapter VI compares *feuilleton* and book versions (VI.1), as well as examining theatre adaptations (VI.2) and parodies (VI.3). The concluding chapter (VII) draws some general conclusions about hypertextuality in the *mystères urbains*, as well as suggesting some potentially fruitful avenues for future research.



### III. *AU SEUIL DES BAS-FONDS: PARATEXT AS PALIMPSEST*

Genette (1987) defines the *paratext* as any liminal matter accompanying a literary work, such as an author's name, a title, a preface or illustrations. This chapter is built around the assumption that the paratext takes on a particular significance in the context of my corpus, where it provides a formal echo of a number of thematic concerns. If we are to momentarily accept the admittedly problematic classification of the *mystères urbains* as 'paraliterary' works,<sup>1</sup> the pertinence of paratextual analysis as an approach to the texts is suggested immediately by the shared prefix.<sup>2</sup> This common ambiguity invites an examination of the relations between paraliterature and paratext.

Specialists have been unanimous in their recognition of specific and sustained paratextual strategies in their own 'paraliterary' or 'popular' corpuses.<sup>3</sup> And yet my examination of the paratext also serves to reinforce my methodological approach which, crucially, is characterized by a rejection of the literary/paraliterary status quo and the terminology which accompanies it. If paratexts are worthy subjects of critical attention, it follows that marginal primary texts deserve a similar critical prominence. As Queffélec puts it:

s'il faut parler de marginalité, c'est bien à contresens que l'on applique le terme au roman-feuilleton populaire – à Dumas, Sue, Ponson du Terrail, Féval, Gaboriau, Montépin, Richebourg, G. Leroux... Eux sont au centre : au centre de la lecture (de tous), au centre de l'idéologie, au centre de

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<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of the implications of this term, refer to my methodological exposition in Chapter I.

<sup>2</sup> See quotation p. 27 (Miller 1979: 219).

<sup>3</sup> Couégnas (1992) devotes an entire chapter to 'Identité paratextuelle' (27-53). See also Boyer 1987 (especially 91-2) and 1992 (especially 111-4). Although Queffélec's emphasis is on the *roman-feuilleton* specifically, rather than paraliterature generally, she remarks the same pre-eminence of paratextual matter (1989: 78).

l'imaginaire. Ce sont les autres, « les grands » qui, à des degrés divers et selon des modes divers, écrivent dans les marges. (1989: 6)<sup>4</sup>

A reversal of margins is thus seen on both micro and macro levels, both within texts and across texts.

McKenzie takes his advocacy of a bibliographical, materialist approach a step further, by arguing that the approach is, and will continue to be, of renewed relevance as the concept of 'text', in the field of popular culture in particular, evolves to encompass 'non-book forms' (1999: 70). Paratextual analysis is thus an extremely versatile approach, which supports the notion of the text as a material construction (14), of which the book is only one particular physical form (26), others being 'films, recorded sound, static images, computer-generated files, and even oral texts' (4). Going forward, then, this approach would lend itself to a comparative analysis of hypertextual transformations across media, such as film adaptations of the *mystères*. Indeed, 'static' images (in the form of illustrated editions) are considered in III.3 below.

Looking beyond issues of classification to the diegetic detail of my corpus texts, we should note that the paratext also seems to provide a formal echo of a diegetic preoccupation. There is a marked preponderance of doormen, gatekeepers and concierges in the *mystères*, Sue's Monsieur and Madame Pipelet being the most obvious example. A host of other characters are either imprisoned in marginal, peripheral misery, or else repeatedly cross and defy boundaries in order to gain

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<sup>4</sup> See also Couégnas: 'nous pouvons faire jouer l'ambiguïté de la préposition « de » en détournant le projet initial affiché: il peut aussi être question des marges *qui encadrent la paralittérature elle-même*, avec l'éventualité d'un renversement d'optique susceptible de remettre en question notre *représentation métaphorique spatiale* du champ culturel...' (2005: 209, emphases in original). See also Couégnas 2005: 215-6 ('la notion de « marge littéraire », utilisée comme outil d'analyse, fait apparaître des évolutions singulières, voire paradoxales. [...] on peut dire que les marges se sont copieusement élargies, au détriment du centre') and 218. Bourdieu (1992) recognizes the same reversal of margins and uses very similar spatial imagery to evoke and analyse it, as, for example in his description of the economically-dominated literary field as '[u]n monde économique à l'envers' (139). On spatial and moral inversions, see also IV.2, V.1, V.3 and VI.3 below.

access to different social spheres. In the former category we could place Fleur-de-Marie, ultimately unable to leave her unsavoury past and live happily as la princesse Amélie, and in the latter, Rodolphe, who moves effortlessly between the seamy Parisian underworld and the court of Gerolstein.<sup>5</sup> Such a pronounced preoccupation with margins, boundaries and borders in the narratives of the *mystères* invites a critical interrogation of the boundaries and borders of the physical text.

Pursuing the analogy between city and text popularized in the nineteenth century and already evoked in this study,<sup>6</sup> fruitful parallels can be drawn between the edges of the city and those of the text. The idea of a 'legible' urban environment is pursued in particularly convincing fashion by Lynch (1960), who suggests that the city image can be usefully divided into paths, landmarks, edges, nodes and districts (1960: 8 and 46). His description of the 'edge' and its relation to the city as a whole is clearly reminiscent of the paratext as it relates to the text proper: 'Edges are the linear elements not considered as paths: they are usually, but not quite always, the boundaries between two kinds of areas. They act as lateral references' (1960: 62). Genette (1987) shows a similar caution to Lynch with regard to the notion of 'boundary': 'Plus que d'une limite ou d'une frontière étanche, il s'agit ici d'un *seuil*' (1987: 8). For Genette, then, the paratext is a zone of transaction and influence rather than a divisive boundary. In much the same way, 'edges', according to Lynch, 'are not necessarily impenetrable. Many edges are uniting seams, rather than isolating barriers [...]' (1960: 65).

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<sup>5</sup> The type of boundary-crossing exemplified by Rodolphe would move beyond the realms of adventure and melodrama in the twentieth century, to take on a serious social resonance, in characters such as Proust's Swann. Rodolphe's links to Gerolstein point to a similarly blurred boundary between fact and fiction. Although a real German town, historically disputed by France and Germany, who both controlled it at various different points between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, Gerolstein was well-known as a fictional duchy, as in Offenbach's *La Grand-duchesse de Gérolstein* of 1867.

<sup>6</sup> See II.2 above.

McKenzie makes a similar point in comparing maps to texts. By suggesting that maps create boundaries and borders,<sup>7</sup> as much as recording pre-existing divisions, and that, by extension, texts do the same, he is again stressing the value of paratextual analysis by suggesting that paratexts represent a creative force and are constitutive of (rather than a reflection of) meaning:

the signs, whether verbal or non-verbal, may also express ideological meanings. As such they can function as potent tools for political control or express political aspirations. The visual adjacency of territories, the border-line definition of linguistic, ethnographic, religious or political boundaries, may be an accurate record of the current facts, but the four forms seldom correspond exactly. A visual definition in terms of any one may be a subversive political act in terms of another. (1999: 47)

Having considered the links between the edges of the city and those of the text, I will now turn to the resonance of the paratext in the context of the palimpsest trope. A number of critics and theorists have noted the way in which the paratext functions as a palimpsest. McKenzie's approach to the text, for example, is 'anti-intentionalist' (1999: 26), rejecting the idea of a single author intention (36-7) or definitive meaning,<sup>8</sup> which amounts to little more than an illusion (60). He argues that meaning is in fact produced by the reader's response (21) to 'the physical forms which mediate meaning' (61) and that 'texts are both closed and open, fixed and flexible, defined by one context only to be redefined in others' (75):

if the fine detail of typography and layout, the material signs which constitute a text, do signify in the ways I have tried to suggest, it must follow that any history of the book – subject as books are to typographic and material change – must be a history of misreading. This is not so strange as it might sound. Every society rewrites its past, every reader rewrites its texts, and, if they have any continuing life at all, at some point every printer redesigns them. (1999: 25)

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<sup>7</sup> See Durham University's recent Institute of Advanced Study research programme on frontiers and borders: <http://www.dur.ac.uk/ias/lifeofthefrontier/>

<sup>8</sup> For a wider discussion of the concept of author, see II.1 above. On authorship as it relates to readership, see IV.3 and VI.1 below.

The implication that paratextual additions rewrite texts, thereby inviting new interpretations of them, places them on a par with more wholesale hypertextual transformations. Calle-Gruber and Zawiska's description of the paratext uses the evocative imagery of grafts and hybrids, clearly reminiscent of the palimpsest, to make a similar point:

les paratextes sont moins des lieux de précipice et d'abîme (au bord de) que des lieux de croissance. En bordure du flux textuel, plage des pages, une autre habitation livresque s'exerce. Adviennent des hybridations, greffes, rejetons, transfusions. En fait, tout peut arriver aux surfaces paratextuelles qui sont terre de croisées. [...] un paratexte ne vient jamais seul, mais appelle frayages et passages. Qu'il n'y a de commencement qui ne soit, toujours déjà, recommencements. (2000: 9)

Although what follows is by no means an exhaustive survey of the paratextual matter accompanying the *mystères urbains*, I have taken care to make choices which reflect both the nature of my corpus and the emphases of my research questions. My emphasis will be on peritexts, or paratexts physically appended to the primary text, as per Genette's definition. I have selected paratexts with a variety of significant material locations and have also paid deliberate attention to paratexts whose functions have proved especially interesting in the context of the *feuilleton*, the original publication format of my corpus texts. The paratexts considered are also both authorial (III.1 and III.2) and editorial (III.2 and III.3). I begin by looking at prefaces (III.1), comparing the arrival of characters in the city, a recurrent diegetic motif, to the reader's entry into the text, via the paratext. In the following section (III.2), I make an explicit link between the city space of the *bas-fonds* and the (para)textual space of the footnote. In a final section (III.3), I consider the function of illustrations.





### III.1 – PREFACES

The preface is a key paratextual location, and particularly so when dealing with a nineteenth-century corpus. According to Noiray: ‘les préfaces de roman sont, dans l’immense corpus des écrits paratextuels produits au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle, les plus intéressantes’ (2007: 6). While Noiray links the richness of the preface to the necessity to defend, promote and legitimize the unstable and evolving genre of the novel,<sup>9</sup> I will contend that the *mystères urbains* play on this expectation of the preface in order to avoid or delay providing the reader with an interpretative key to the text, so that the motif of initiation ultimately emerges as empty rhetoric. Fictional prefaces result in a blurring of *récit* and *discours*, and act as a playful challenge to the reader, as he attempts to gain purchase on both the text and the city it evokes.

Genette writes ‘les fonctions préfacielles [...] me semblent pour l’essentiel déterminés à la fois par des considérations de lieu, de moment, et de nature du destinataire’ (1987: 199). My analysis of prefaces in the *mystères urbains* will therefore address these considerations, looking in particular at the location of the preface and its participation in a rhetoric of initiation, prefatorial delays, and finally fictional prefaces.

#### A rhetoric of initiation

The motif of initiation is recurrent in the *mystères urbains*, where, in order to enter the city’s mysterious underworld, characters have to traverse a kind of urban no-man’s land, as Letourneux (2007) explains:

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<sup>9</sup> See also Gershman 1964: 13.

Dans les récits de « mystères urbains », la rupture ontologique opérée au sein de la ville passe souvent par un [...] non-lieu qui, à la façon du tunnel qu'emprunte Alice pour se rendre au pays des merveilles, correspond à un basculement de la ville réelle à une ville d'une tout autre nature, à laquelle on ne peut accéder que par le roman.

Letourneux evokes a number of these 'lieux de passage', linking the 'real' city to a fantastical underbelly,<sup>10</sup> such as the 'passage de l'opéra' in Aimard's *Invisibles de Paris*, all of which are characterized by darkness and secrecy. Crucially, Rigolot also identifies 'initiation' as one of the main functions of the preface (2000: 19) and offers a description of this intermediary textual space which is strikingly similar to that of the urban passages evoked by Letourneux:

Véritable métaphore architecturale du monument littéraire, [la préface] occupe le seuil de l'édifice intellectuel que le lecteur s'apprête à franchir : vestibule initiatique, lieu de passage, transition nécessaire entre le monde chaotique de la vie extérieure et l'univers réglé de la lecture.  
(Rigolot 2000: 19)

Similarly, many of Letourneux's remarks, on re-reading, could easily be applied to the (para)text as well as to the city. The contrast between the respective worlds of 'initiés' and 'novices' could be equated to the ontological separation, bridged by the preface, between the world of the book and the world of the reader:

Si cette rue [la rue de la Sourdière, in Féval's *Habits noirs*] est détachée du monde, c'est bien qu'elle figure avant tout un seuil [the term is inevitably reminiscent of Genette's seminal study], celui qui sépare le monde des novices (qui restent à la surface de la ville) de celui des initiés (qui pénètrent de l'autre côté). (Letourneux 2007)

The preface is thus the site *par excellence* from which to invite the reader to discover the mysteries of the city, and of the text. The reader becomes a would-be 'initié', titillated by the prospect of the text to follow, and challenged to prove himself equal

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<sup>10</sup> On the fantastic as a genre, see Todorov 1970.

to the task of reading through to the end. As Dumas puts it, ‘*Si le lecteur veut risquer, avec moi, un pèlerinage vers les jours de ma jeunesse [...]*’ (MOHI: 9, my emphases). Sue’s appeal is even more emphatic:

Ce début annonce au lecteur qu’il doit assister à de sinistres scènes ; *s’il y consent*, il pénétrera dans des régions horribles, inconnues [...] Le lecteur, prévenu de l’excursion que nous lui proposons d’entreprendre parmi les naturels de cette race infernale qui peuple les prisons, les bagnes, et dont le sang rougit les échafauds... *le lecteur voudrait peut-être bien nous suivre*. Sans doute cette investigation sera nouvelle pour lui ; *hâtons-nous de l’avertir d’abord que, s’il pose d’abord le pied sur le dernier échelon de l’échelle sociale, à mesure que le récit marchera, l’atmosphère s’épurera de plus en plus*. (MP: 31-2, my emphases)

The implication is that not all prospective readers will be worthy of the challenge, and so those who do agree to read on will become part of a select elite, privy to mysterious, esoteric knowledge, much like the secret societies we find in many of the *mystères* (and whose role is examined in section IV.2 below).<sup>11</sup>

According to Genette, an original preface must ‘*retenir et guider le lecteur en lui expliquant pourquoi et comment il doit lire le texte*’ (1987: 241, my emphases). While the rhetoric of initiation is certainly an effective means of holding the reader’s attention, the business of providing guidance to the reader as to how to go about reading the text is rather more problematic. The desire to dictate a particular reading (‘*assurer au texte une bonne lecture*’ (Genette 1987: 200)) proved a controversial one in the nineteenth century, due in large part to the absence of a clear distinction between literature and criticism.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Noiray notes a similar appeal to a ‘chosen few’ in Stendhal’s preface to *Lucien Leuwen*: ‘le public visé n’est pas l’ensemble des lecteurs possibles, mais une élite choisie, seule capable de sympathie avec l’écrivain. De même l’« éditeur » d’*Oberman* déclare que ces lettres ne sont destinées qu’à des « adeptes », c’est-à-dire à « la société éparsée et secrète » des êtres sensibles, « dont la nature avait fait membre celui qui les écrit »’ (2007: 11).

<sup>12</sup> ‘Pendant la majeure partie du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle, critique et création littéraires ont été une seule et même chose. Le romancier (Balzac, George Sand, Zola) était à lui-même son propre commentateur, et la critique journalistique, malgré sa puissance, n’apparaissait aux yeux des écrivains que comme la servante et le faire-valoir de l’œuvre littéraire’ (Noiray 2007: 19).

Henry James, for example, while praising Maupassant as an ‘artist’, was critical of his attempts at ‘commentary’ in his famous 1888 preface to *Pierre et Jean* (Paris: Ollendorff), writing:

The first artists, in any line, are doubtless not those whose general ideas about their art are most often on their lips – those who most abound in precept, apology, and formula and can best tell us the reasons and the philosophy of things. We know the first usually by their energetic practice, the constancy with which they apply their principles, and the serenity with which they leave us to hunt for their secret in the illustration, the concrete example. *None the less it often happens that a valid artist utters his mystery, flashes upon us for a moment the light by which he works, shows us the rule by which he holds it just that he should be measured.* The accident is happiest, I think, when it is soonest over; the shortest explanations of the products of genius are best, and there is many a creator of living figures whose friends, however full of faith in his inspiration, will do well to pray for him when he sallies forth into the dim wilderness of theory. The doctrine is apt to be so much less inspired than the work, the work is often so much more intelligent than the doctrine. (James 1894: 243-4, my emphasis)

Flaubert, famous for refusing to write prefaces to his own works,<sup>13</sup> levelled a similar criticism at Zola, whose preface to *La Fortune des Rougon*, he felt, gave rather too much away:

Je n’en blâme que la préface. Selon moi, elle gâte votre œuvre qui est si impartiale et si haute. Vous y dites votre secret, ce qui est trop candide, et vous exprimez votre opinion, chose que, dans ma poétique (à moi), un romancier n’a pas le droit de faire. (Genette 1987: 233)<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> According to Noiray, ‘Flaubert [...] s’est toujours refusé à écrire la moindre préface, affirmant que le romancier n’avait pas à s’expliquer, encore moins à se disculper. Pour lui, toute intervention est une compromission. L’auteur, installé dans son œuvre comme Dieu dans sa création, « présent partout et visible nulle part » doit taire ses opinions et garder son secret’ (2007: 14). Prefaces could also aggravate concerns about the morality of a given work. Although the prefaceless *Madame Bovary* prompted a famous obscenity trial, Flaubert was acquitted, whereas Baudelaire’s *Fleurs du mal*, complete with inflammatory preface, resulted in the poet’s prosecution.

<sup>14</sup> On the problem of authorial commentary in the twentieth century, see Genette, who quotes Blanchot’s comparison of the writer to ‘le lecteur privilégié, le commentateur principal ou simplement l’auxiliaire zélé qui donne ou impose sa version, résout l’énigme, délivre le secret et interrompt autoritairement [...] la chaîne herméneutique, puisqu’il se prétend l’interprète suffisant, premier et dernier’ (1987: 236-7).

This notion of an artist ‘utter[ing] his mystery’ and giving away his secrets in a preface, to the detriment of the text which follows it, is particularly interesting in the context of the *mystères urbains*. The idea of the preface as a ‘mode d’emploi’,<sup>15</sup> although undoubtedly a fitting analogy in the context of popular literature, in line with the notion of the book as a commodity, requiring a set of instructions for use, poses a clear threat to the premise of mystery:

Ce que l’œuvre littéraire [...] ne peut accomplir que partiellement et souvent de manière oblique ou ambiguë, parce qu’il y a en elle trop d’obstacles à une compréhension directe et totale (une structure trop complexe, une substance trop riche, un langage trop neuf), la préface est censée le réussir. Elle est chargée, à l’origine, de combler le déficit de lisibilité lié à la création littéraire, en apportant au lecteur les éléments indispensables à la bonne interprétation du texte. Elle doit être, d’abord, le mode d’emploi de l’œuvre. (Noiray 2007: 8-9)

However, an all too exhaustive guide to interpreting the text (Iser (1978: 86) terms this ‘total organization’) must be avoided. This would absolve the reader of any role and result in ‘total consumption’ of the text. While paraliterature is often organized in this way, passivity cannot be allowed to become boredom. Although the reader expects a certain amount of ready-made explanation from the text, he also wants something to stimulate his imagination. As Iser puts it:

The whole process of comprehension is set in motion by the need to familiarize the *unfamiliar* (and literature would be barren indeed if it led only to a recognition of the already familiar). In short, the reader will only begin to search for (and so actualize) the meaning if he does not *know* it, and so it is the unknown factors in the text that set him off on his quest. (1978: 42-3, emphases in original)

It is unsurprising, then, that many of the texts choose to dispense with prefatorial discourse altogether, opening with an expositional prologue (this seems to have been

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<sup>15</sup> The term is used by both Noiray (2007: 8-9) and Derrida (1972b: 68); Mitterand refers to ‘un modèle de [...] lecture’ (1980: 26).

Pierre Zaccone's preferred tactic, as in *Les Mystères du vieux Paris*, *Les Nuits de Paris* and *Les Pieuvres de Paris*) or an opening *in medias res ex abrupto*.<sup>16</sup> If the *mystères* which do have prefaces nonetheless manage to preserve a sense of mystery, this is achieved by a clever and selective use of prefatorial conventions. In particular, we see a marked emphasis on the 'pourquoi' (to return to Genette's explanation of the functions of the original preface) rather than the 'comment'.

It would be inaccurate to say that the *mystères*, as popular, commercial fiction, did not require the endorsement of critics, but only the approval of the public as, in fact, there was little distinction between 'literary' and 'popular' fiction before the last quarter of the century<sup>17</sup> and, as such, the *mystères* would have been subject to critical scrutiny as much as any other work. Some of the responses to critics we see in the prefaces are nonetheless suspiciously overzealous. In his preface to *Les Mystères de Nancy*, Verneuil, for example, launches into a protracted diatribe against his critics, comparing the reception of his work to that of Molière's *Tartuffe*, and portraying the detractors as hypocritical 'faux religieux'. Rather than a sincere moral defence of the work, this seems to be a means of emphasizing the 'pourquoi lire' (the moral usefulness of the work and the traditional nature of the subject matter) and thereby distracting the reader's attention away from the question of 'comment lire'. Verneuil's preface overshadows the text itself, and not just the question of its interpretation, appearing, at times, to be asserting itself as a primary text in its own right. Indeed, the following excerpt, complete with dramatic vocabulary and lurid

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<sup>16</sup> See Genette 1987: 169-72.

<sup>17</sup> As Queffélec explains, early criticism of the *feuilleton* must be seen in the context of a more general criticism of Romantic literature (1989: 34) and, even as a critical distinction developed in the 1860s, it was still the novel in general, rather than its internal hierarchy, which was the main target of attack (71-3). The *crise du roman*, reflecting and perpetuating 'popular' and 'avant-garde' poles, would not peak until the *fin de siècle* (98-9). See also Charle 1979 and Bourdieu 1998 [1992]: 203 and 204.

exclamation mark, when read out of context, could quite easily have been taken from the primary text rather than the preface:

Oh! je sais parfaitement ce qu'ils sont, je connais aussi bien leur méchanceté que leurs viles passions [...]. La raison va bientôt lever son sceptre de reine, qu'ils y prennent garde, car si leur masque tombe, ils seront bien faibles, bien misérables. (NANCY: VII)

When questions are raised regarding interpretation, conclusive answers are rarely provided. Commentary on the title, for example, is made more often to indicate the text's difference and departure from the hypotext than as a helpful *grille de lecture*. Genette describes this as 'une mise en garde contre les suggestions trompeuses [...] du titre' (1987: 218). Verneuil, for example, is adamant in his rejection of the assumptions made by critics based on the title of his *Mystères de Nancy*, which he claims had not even been written when the title was announced:

ceux qui me jugeaient ainsi si sûrement ne me connaissaient pas plus qu'ils ne pouvaient connaître mon ouvrage qui n'était pas encore commencé [...]. On annonce un ouvrage qui a un titre inquiétant pour leurs vices ? vite ils aboient, ils crient ou plutôt ils braient que l'auteur est un homme de rien et l'œuvre un pamphlet sentant le cabaret. (NANCY: VI-VII)

Like Verneuil, Scholl also stresses the difference of his work from that of Sue, citing legal restrictions as the reason for its limitations (Appendix VIII.3.1).<sup>18</sup> Scholl's preface is clearly a way of pre-empting criticism by acknowledging the superficiality of his own work before critics get the chance to do so, but the tone of political frustration, coupled with Scholl's crusading promise at the end of the preface ('Nous comblerons un jour cette lacune et nous rachèterons notre silence') also piques the reader's interest, inviting him to comb the text for ways in which Scholl may have

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<sup>18</sup> Legislation restricting the press was passed in February 1852 and not relaxed until 1870 (Queffélec 1989).

attempted to outwit the censors. All these functions serve as a distraction to the reader looking for an interpretative key to the text.

In Zybin's *Mystères de Nice*, a series of short stories and vignettes on the various crimes and scandals that take place in the city, we actually see an interpretative key offered to the reader, only to be repeatedly invalidated by the text. The preface establishes a clear 'contrat de fiction', by stating 'Je tiens à faire observer de nouveau en commençant, que ce nouvel ouvrage, comme le précédent, ne fait allusion à aucune personnalité et ne contient aucun propos contre Nice'. But the primary text which follows makes a series of playful challenges to the preface's assertion. To give just a couple of examples, the description of a cantankerous old man in 'Un type' includes a challenge to the reader: 'Si vous ne me croyez pas, allez au café où vous le trouverez tous les soirs' (NICE II: 23). And the conclusion to 'La nouvelle Fénélla' also asserts that it is a true story: 'Cette histoire tragique a fait, dans le temps, beaucoup de bruit à Nice, et les journaux de la localité en ont longuement parlé, sans cependant donner les détails que vient de lire le lecteur' (NICE II: 81).

To return to the motif of initiation which was our starting point, we can again draw parallels between the city and the text, as initiation into both emerges as empty rhetoric. As Letourneux (2007) explains, the initiation which takes place in the narratives of the *mystères* is ultimately anti-climactic.<sup>19</sup> In much the same way, the preface is not there to provide a genuine interpretative key to the text, as we might expect, but becomes part of the mystery itself, problematizing, rather than demystifying, the primary text. As Derrida puts it:

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<sup>19</sup> See quotation p. 76.



en affectant de regarder en arrière et de faire retour, on *relance*, on ajoute alors un texte, on complique la scène, on pratique dans le labyrinthe l'ouverture d'une digression supplémentaire, d'un faux miroir aussi qui enfonce l'infinité dans une spéculation mimée, c'est-à-dire sans fin.  
(1972b: 37)

The following section will consider the ways in which delay is created, in both original and later prefaces, to similar effect.

### **Delays**

Timing is an important consideration in the prefaces to the *mystères urbains*. Provisional original prefaces (or as Genette puts it 'ces injonctions à attendre le tout pour juger du fragment' (1987: 223)) are used to encourage the reader to buy the next part of a serialized publication. Thus in *Les Mystères de Constantinople*, Zadès beseeches us:

Je prie seulement mes lecteurs de ne pas se hâter de me juger, au moins avant la quinzième livraison. Là, mon sujet sera entièrement exposé, tous mes personnages seront mis en scène, toutes mes intrigues à jour, et quoiqu'il faille le dénouement de tout ceci pour être à même de se prononcer définitivement, néanmoins mes lecteurs peuvent se livrer dès lors à des critiques soit d'approbation, soit de..... condamnation. (CONST: II)

Verneuil makes a similar appeal to '[l]es personnes qui, après avoir lu mon prospectus, ont voulu bien m'honorer de leur souscription' (NANCY: IX).

Preterition, described by Genette as 'l'art d'écrire une préface en expliquant qu'on ne le fera pas' (1987: 237), is another means of stringing the reader along. Zadès tells us that 'Je n'entrerai pas dans les détails concernant mon but, on les trouvera dans le cours de mon récit' (CONST: II). We are reminded of Barthes's comparison of the reading act to that of watching a strip-tease. '[U]n dévoilement progressif' (1973a: 18) of meaning serves to tease and tantalize the reader. Any

references to what the preface, or text, will *not* do (but quite easily could have done) work in much the same way, titillating the reader by postponing meaning and playing on ‘la force de *suspension* du plaisir’ (Barthes 1973a: 87, emphasis in original) so as to increase desire, as in Verneuil’s preface to *Les Mystères de Nancy*, in which he claims to have withheld certain salacious details so as not to cause upset to those involved:

j’aurais parfaitement pu faire dévoiler malignement d’autres mystères par Georges, le personnage critique, placé de manière à tout atteindre ; mais sans doute retenu par la crainte de *porter trop de trouble dans les familles* et de faire *répandre trop de larmes*, [...], je me suis modestement modéré. (NANCY: IX, emphasis in original)

The emphasis is on preparation and anticipation; *désir* rather than *plaisir*, the latter being synonymous, ultimately, with disappointment. Del Lungo notes that this ‘eroticization’ is particularly significant at the beginning of texts: ‘Le commencement est un véritable lieu de perdition, qui envoûte le lecteur par l’irrésistible attraction de l’écriture, par une séduction ineffable, presque de l’ordre de la sensualité [...]’ (2003: 14).<sup>20</sup> Once again, useful comparisons can be made between paratextual space and urban space, as numerous invitations in the texts to ‘percer’ or ‘pénétrer’ the mysteries of a feminized city carry a similar sexual connotation.<sup>21</sup>

Later prefaces are another example of delay. Genette describes the preface to the second edition of a work as ‘une occasion pragmatique très spécifique’ (1987: 177) and points out that original (book) editions can have later prefaces, for example when the work has been published originally as a serialization: ‘certaines éditions originales peuvent être postérieures à la première apparition publique d’un texte :

<sup>20</sup> See also Del Lungo 2003: 45 and 47.

<sup>21</sup> See IV.3 below.

c'est le cas [...] des romans d'abord prépubliés en feuilleton (journal ou revue) [où] l'édition originale peut être, paradoxalement, l'occasion d'une préface typiquement ultérieure' (1987: 177).

Prefaces to the *mystères* are thus often only original in the context of book publication. Because the texts have already had a public airing in *feuilleton* format, these prefaces often resemble later prefaces, in providing direct responses to critical reactions to the serialized version.

Genette explains that the main function of the later preface is to provide a response to the reaction of the public and of critics to the original publication (1987: 243). In the preface to the second edition of Zola's *Mystères de Marseille* (1884),<sup>22</sup> this function seems to provide another pretext to focus on the 'pourquoi' of the preface and thereby avoid compromising the mystery of the text. Zola finds an indirect way to extol his own virtues as a writer, adopting an apologetic tone so as to highlight, as is customary in prefaces, his inadequacy for the task, the implication being that if he is not a competent 'fabricant de feuilletons' this is because he is a serious, talented writer with a rather more significant 'don' than that of churning out potboilers: 'Cette idée de journaliste n'était pas plus sotte qu'une autre, et le malheur a été sans doute qu'il ne fût pas tombé sur un fabricant de feuilletons, ayant le don des vastes machines romanesques.' Zola thus, cleverly and discreetly, places himself in a strong position from which to respond to his detractors. This positioning, along with references in this preface to *Thérèse Raquin*, written at the same time as *Les Mystères de Marseille*, remind us of Zola's scathing belittlement of his critics, for whom he was obliged to 'allume[r] une lanterne en plein jour', in the preface to the second edition of that novel.

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<sup>22</sup> This later preface is reproduced, without page numbers, in the 2010 edition of the novel.

He addresses those who have accused him of wanting to destroy all evidence of this early, mediocre novel and who ‘espéraient y trouver un péché caché, une faute littéraire dont je voudrais effacer la trace’. The idea of the author as criminal is pursued, with Zola using imagery we would expect of the text itself rather than its preface. He refers, for example, to ‘[c]ette idée que j’avais un cadavre à cacher’.

He stresses his belief in honesty and transparency as a writer:

J’ai toujours écrit au grand jour, j’ai toujours dit à voix haute ce que je croyais devoir dire, et je n’ai à retirer ni une œuvre ni une opinion. [...] Je suis d’avis qu’un écrivain doit se donner tout entier au public, sans choisir lui-même parmi ses œuvres, car la plus faible est souvent la plus documentaire sur son talent. (MARS: preface)

Zola is making a point of revealing and explaining the mysteries and misdemeanours of his evolution as a writer. This emphasis on the author’s trajectory and the text’s genesis draws on a rhetoric of revelation, for example via the use of expressions such as ‘écri[re] au grand jour’ and ‘di[re] à voix haute’. This displacement of what the reader would recognize as a fictional rhetoric to the preface is a way of appeasing the reader and postponing the revelation of the mysteries he is really waiting for, namely those of Marseille.

The following section will pursue this overlap between text and paratext further, considering instances of prefatorial discourse in the primary text as well as examples of fictional prefaces.

### **Fictional prefaces**

As Genette points out, prefaces which stand physically separate from their primary texts are a phenomenon tied to the existence of the book: ‘Comme tous les autres éléments du paratexte, la préface séparée du texte par les moyens de présentation que

nous connaissons aujourd'hui [...] est une pratique liée à l'existence du livre, c'est-à-dire du texte imprimé' (1987: 166). He puts forward a broad definition of the preface, which includes sections of text incorporated in the primary, fictional text but which nonetheless clearly constitute '[un] discours préfaciel' (1987: 181).<sup>23</sup> Genette explains that this 'pauvreté de la présentation' (166), which resulted in a preponderance of 'incorporated prefaces', was characteristic of the pre-Gutenberg, manuscript era (166-73), but a comparable paratextual minimalism is evident in many of the *mystères urbains*, texts published originally in *feuilleton* format, before their subsequent publication *en volume*. To take Sue's *Mystères de Paris* as an example, the opening section of text,<sup>24</sup> separated only by a dotted line from the rest of the text in the *Journal des Débats*, clearly fulfils the same functions as a separate preface, particularly by setting out why the text merits the reader's attention. Sue anticipates criticism, of both the subject matter and his handling of it: 'Nous craignons d'abord qu'on ne nous accuse de rechercher des épisodes repoussants, et, une fois même cette licence admise, qu'on ne nous trouve au-dessous de la tâche qu'impose la reproduction fidèle, vigoureuse, hardie, de ces mœurs excentriques' (MP: 32). He pre-empts such criticism by asserting the aesthetic and, by extension, moral 'puissance des contrastes': 'Sous ce point de vue de l'art, il est peut-être bon de reproduire certains caractères, certaines existences, certaines figures, dont les couleurs sombre, énergiques, peut-être même crues, serviront de repoussoir, d'opposition à des scènes d'un tout autre genre' (MP: 32).

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<sup>23</sup> On the 'discours préfaciel' and its various forms and locations, see also Gershman 1964: 9, Del Lungo 2003: 66 and Mitterand 1980: 21.

<sup>24</sup> 'Un *tapis-franc*, en argot de vol et de meurtre, signifie un estaminet ou un cabaret du plus bas étage. [...] à mesure que le récit marchera, l'atmosphère s'épurera de plus en plus' (MP: 31-2). On this key incorporated preface, see also Gauthier 2011: 398-9.

While Sue's text is an example of *discours* impinging on *récit*,<sup>25</sup> a similar 'contamination' occurs in the opposite direction in a number of *mystères* which have fictional prefaces. In Lermina's *Mystère-ville*, a postface informs us that 'Le manuscrit a été trouvé par un moujik, sur la place Biely Gorod, à Moscou. Il semblait être tombé du ciel' (MVILLE: 303). Similarly, in the preface to Najiac's *Mystères de Lille*, the author informs us that the text is a manuscript he found in the hidden drawer of an antique desk and has published according to instructions left by the author. This is an example of what Genette calls 'la préface auctoriale dénégative', the disavowing authorial, pseudo-editorial, preface (1987: 283). Najiac's preface is unquestionably fictional from the outset, in that it resembles the stereotypical paraliterary *incipit*, providing, for example, the dramatic meteorological detail<sup>26</sup> we see at the start of many of the primary texts:

Arrivé à Lille par l'express de midi quarante-deux, je me dirigeai rapidement vers la demeure d'un client avec lequel j'avais l'espoir de faire une grosse affaire : le temps était lourd et couvert et je me hâtai, pour arriver sans être mouillé. En passant rue Saint-Nicolas, la pluie commença à tomber avec violence, je n'eus que le temps de me réfugier sous une grande porte pour me mettre à l'abri. (LILLE: 1-2)

In the eighteenth century, the *manuscrit trouvé* was a tactical trope which allowed the author to deny responsibility for a given work, which helped protect not only said author, but also the novel, a genre still struggling to assert itself, from accusations of implausibility and immorality.<sup>27</sup> But the *topos* very quickly came to be recognized as a fictional device:

<sup>25</sup> The distinction, based on that made by the Russian Formalists between *syuzhet* and *fabula*, is made by Benveniste (1966) and invoked by Mitterand (1980: 21). See also Culler (1975: 230-4), and Genette's 'Frontières du récit' (1969: 61-9). On *sujet* and *fabula* as discussed by Todorov (1971), see also III.2 and IV.1 below.

<sup>26</sup> See Del Lungo 2003: 67.

<sup>27</sup> Both Angelet (1990: 167-8) and Del Lungo (2003: 58) give numerous examples of texts which use the device, including, as far back as the Middle Ages, Chrétien de Troyes's *Cligès*, Cervantes's *Don*

tout texte liminaire annonçant un manuscrit trouvé, ou volé, ou sauvé des flammes, était aussitôt perçu comme un signal de la fiction. En d'autres mots, la formule, indéfiniment variée : « J'ai eu la chance de mettre la main sur le document que voici » signifiait pour le lecteur : « Voici un roman dont je suis l'auteur. » A bon entendeur, salut. (Angelet 1990: 169)

As such, its use in the nineteenth century was decidedly self-conscious and parodic.<sup>28</sup>

The preface to *Les Mystères de Lille*, as well as signposting the text as fiction, also absolves the author of any obligation to provide an interpretive key to the text, via the excuse that the text is 'un simple document [...] sans visée littéraire' (Genette 1987: 283), or at least no literary aim to which the supposed editor is privy. Although the reader recognizes this as a convenient ruse on the part of the author, he is willing to play his part in the game, so as not to compromise the mystery he expects of the text. The reader's recognition of this formal trick means that his reading of the text is a cautious and vigilant one. In a permanent state of doubt as to the reliability of the text, the reader is also primed for the diegetic prominence of mystifications, lies and trickery in the text to follow.<sup>29</sup>

The *manuscrit trouvé* also seems to have a metatextual resonance in Najiac's preface. The discovery of the text in the desk drawer could be read as a nod to the narrative technique of the *récit à tiroirs*.<sup>30</sup> The episode could also be said to fictionalize the process of hypertextual transformation. The desk is much like a

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*Quichotte*, and a plethora of eighteenth-century novels, such as Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and *Moll Flanders*, Diderot's *Jacques le Fataliste*, Marivaux's *La Vie de Marianne* and Richardson's *Pamela*.

<sup>28</sup> This self-consciousness was at its height by the end of the century, with the 'avant-propos' to Darien's *Le Voleur* rejecting clichéd denials of responsibility in favour of a playful link between diegetic crime and literary theft: 'Le livre qu'on va lire, et que je signe, n'est pas de moi. [...] Ce livre ne m'a point été remis par un ministre, ni confié par un notaire, ni légué par un caissier. Je l'ai volé' (1987 [1897]: 27). On the self-conscious, parodic use of the *manuscrit trouvé*, see also Del Lungo 2003: 57-8. Note Angelet's (1990) claim that the *manuscrit trouvé* was used in ironic, parodic fashion even in the eighteenth century.

<sup>29</sup> Del Lungo notes a similar thematic resonance of formal tricks in *Les Liaisons dangereuses*: 'une histoire dans laquelle l'intrigue, la corruption, le piège et le mensonge jouent un rôle thématique fondamental' (2003: 61).

<sup>30</sup> Diegetic allusions to this narrative technique are frequent in the *mystères* (see also III.2 below). On the 'tiroir' metaphor in literature in general, see Bachelard 1957: 79-82. For a twentieth-century take on the metaphor, see Aymé's *Les tiroirs de l'inconnu* (1960).

palimpsestuous document, which must be dusted off and polished up to unearth its hidden layer. Del Lungo explains the appeal of this image particularly well:

C'est un désir irréalisable, un vrai fantasme de l'artiste, que de pouvoir *trouver* l'œuvre achevée et de contourner ainsi le parcours de genèse qui conduit l'idée à la réalisation de l'œuvre d'art. Dans une sorte d'hallucination sensorielle, les paroles de Georges Braque<sup>31</sup> exposent un mouvement de création où l'acte d'enlever se substituerait à celui de mettre, où le tableau se ferait alors, paradoxalement et contre tout précepte, *per via di levare*. Le peintre rêve ici d'épousseter la toile avec ses pinceaux pour libérer une œuvre cachée mais déjà finie ; de la même façon, l'écrivain pourrait rêver de disséminer d'un souffle, ou d'un coup de crayon, le blanc de la page pour dévoiler ainsi le tracé d'une écriture – l'encre noir des paroles imaginées. (2003: 21)

Hence the evocative description of the desk in which the manuscript is discovered, the elegance and style of which is only partially obscured by its 'nombreuses cicatrices':

[...] il se distinguait de tout ce qui l'entourait par un style que le temps n'avait pu lui ôter; ses pieds étaient finement découpés, toutes ses courbes étaient remplies d'harmonie et l'on voyait encore la trace et les restes de bronzes qui avaient dû rehausser sa bonne mine, il était usé, écaillé, meurtri, mais il était facile de reconnaître son origine fastueuse sous les nombreuses cicatrices qui attestaient ses longs services. (LILLE: 3)

The palimpsestuous premise of my corpus is replicated *en abyme* by the preface, which superimposes the story of the manuscript's discovery on to the story of the primary text (Del Lungo 2003: 35). Derrida likens the preface to Freud's *bloc magique*,<sup>32</sup> explaining that prefaces are destined to be overwritten by the texts that follow them: 'On a toujours écrit les préfaces semble-t-il [...] en vue de leur propre effacement. Parvenu à la limite du *pré-* [...], le trajet doit en son terme s'annuler'

<sup>31</sup> Del Lungo's reference is to Georges Braque's *Mon tableau*: 'Quand je commence, il me semble que mon tableau est de l'autre côté, seulement couvert de cette poussière blanche, la toile. Il me suffit de l'épousseter. J'ai une petite brosse à dégager le bleu, une autre le vert ou le jaune : mes pinceaux. Lorsque tout est nettoyé, le tableau est fini' (2003: 21).

<sup>32</sup> On the relationship of the psychoanalytic model of the Mystic Writing-Pad to the palimpsest trope, see Dillon 2007: 29.



(1972b: 15).<sup>33</sup> Here, conversely, it is the preface, an intriguing and relatively lengthy fictional text in its own right (Najiac's preface is over a thousand words), which threatens to overshadow the primary text. Angelet's description of this phenomenon ('La préface se gonfle démesurément et devient comme l'embryon d'un second roman qui pourrait se développer à l'aise et de façon autonome, au point de parasiter le premier, voire de le dévorer' (1990: 171)) reminds us of Derrida's assertion that 'la préface est partout, elle est plus grande que le livre' (1972b: 73).<sup>34</sup> The boundaries between text and paratext, *récit* and *discours*, emerge as increasingly arbitrary and indistinct. This formal confusion of text and paratext seems to reflect an important theme in the *mystères*, namely the difficulties encountered by anyone attempting to delineate and gain purchase on the city, whose parameters remain resolutely indeterminate and amorphous. In Zaccone's *Mystères du vieux Paris*, for example, the hero Rustique, arriving in Paris for the first time, stops at a tavern to ask how far he is from the capital, much to the amusement of the crowd of students drinking there:

[...] voilà près de douze heures que je chevauche sur cette route du diable, sans en pouvoir trouver la fin, – pourrais-tu me dire si Paris est encore loin d'ici ?

Ces paroles étaient à peine achevées qu'un rire homérique circula dans les rangs moqueurs des écoliers.

[...]

– Monseigneur ne connaît donc pas Paris ?

– C'est la première fois que j'y viens.

– Tout s'explique alors.

– Comment ?

– Vous y êtes.

– A Paris ?

– Non, pas précisément, mais à deux pas de la porte Saint-Jacques, ce qui revient au même. (VIEUX I: 57-9)

<sup>33</sup> See also Gleize: 'le préfâciel est par définition un discours qui va vers son annulation (l'œuvre), une préface est toujours en trop' (1980: 16).

<sup>34</sup> On lengthy prefaces which threaten to eclipse their primary texts, see also Genette's discussion of 'la monumentale « préface »' written by Sartre for Genet's *Œuvres complètes* (1987: 272).

Rustique's confusion is akin to that of the reader, poised on the threshold of the text and confronted by a bewildering mélange of fact and fiction, *discours* and *récit*.

To conclude, prefaces to the *mystères urbains* use various methods to avoid or delay providing the reader with a 'mode d'emploi' to the text. Just as the process of initiation into the underworld of the city amounts, on examination, to little more than 'une gesticulation à vide' (Letourneux 2007), the preface does not supply the interpretative key to the text the reader might expect, but rather a series of titillating glimpses of what is to follow or dramatized accounts of how the text came to be: a list of reasons why the text should be read, rather than an explanation of how to go about doing so. Fictional prefaces are another way of distracting the reader from his search for a key to the text, as well as being a formal device which prepares the reader for important diegetic concerns, such as deception and trickery. The porosity we see between text and paratext and the way the two vie for our attention mean that the parameters of the text become just as difficult to define as those of the city itself.

### III.2 – FOOTNOTES

In this section, I wish to make an explicit link between the city space of the *bas-fonds* and the (para)textual space of the footnote, drawing on examples taken from Sue's *Mystères de Paris* (1842-3), Vidocq's *Vrais Mystères de Paris* (1844), Zadès's *Mystères de Constantinople* (1862), Boisgobey's *Mystères du nouveau Paris* (1876) and Zaccane's *Nuits de Paris* (c. 1867). I will show that the footnotes have both thematic and formal implications in these texts and that the various ways in which they parody scholarly conventions challenge our assumptions about the boundaries of text and paratext.

Footnotes are conspicuous and numerous in the early *mystères* in particular and, as such, appear worthy of investigation. It is my contention that the footnote is of particular interest in the *mystères urbains* in that its spatial manifestation echoes the subject matter it deals with: polarized physical spaces referred to in descriptions of the city find their echo in the material dimensions of the text, with references to the *bas-fonds* explained via paratextual matter situated, fittingly, at the foot of the printed page. And it is these buried, hidden strata of the city, along with the deeper 'levels' of the text, be they abstract 'subtexts' or material aspects such as footnotes, which hold the most hermeneutic promise. As Mitchell puts it: 'We usually discern at least two levels in any literary work, labeled by such binary oppositions as literal and figurative, or explicit and implicit [...]. Our reading takes us "deeper" beneath the surface of the work to its hidden core where the most profound meanings reside' (1980: 550).<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> The act of reading is inherently spatial and archaeological: 'a process that goes inside and brings something out (hence, explication and exegesis)' (Mitchell 1980: 559).

### From spoken word to printed page

I will begin by considering the thematic content of the footnotes. Notes are used repeatedly to explain vernacular terms, such as in the following example from Boisgobey's *Mystères du nouveau Paris*:

– Pas de *coton* (1) ici ! Le *dab* de la *Bibine* (2) nous *frime* comme s'il voulait nous *coquer* (3) et j'ai l'idée que la *rousse* bat l'*antif* dans la *trime* (4).

(1) Rixe.

(2) Maître du cabaret.

(3) Dénoncer.

(4) Bat le pavé dans la rue.

(NOUV: 72)

Orality was also a defining characteristic of the reading process, in that many nineteenth-century 'readers' in fact had popular fiction read out to them. This was a result of both the high price of newspapers (Moïse Millaud's *vente au numéro à prix réduit* was only inaugurated with the launch of *Le Petit Journal*, in 1863) and widespread illiteracy.<sup>36</sup> As Kenner puts it: 'Not only was reading for many centuries an operation always performed with the voice, not merely the eye, but writing, even writing for the press, was controlled by the presupposition that these words here chosen would ideally be animated by speech' (1974: xiv).

And yet the footnote is inherently spatial, its existence inextricably linked to that of the printed page, and as such defies an oral, temporal reading:<sup>37</sup>

The footnote's relation to the passage from which it depends is established wholly by visual and typographic means, and will typically defeat all efforts of the speaking voice to clarify it without visual aid. [...] You cannot read a passage of notes aloud, interpolating the footnotes, and make the subordination of the footnotes clear, and keep the whole sounding natural.

<sup>36</sup> On the transition from oral to written literature in general, see Frank 1978: 289.

<sup>37</sup> On the oral, temporal nature of language, see Kenner 1974: 34 and 56. On Lessing's preference for action rather than description, based on an equation of literature and oral recitation, see Frank 1978: 282. On space and time in literature as complementary, rather than antithetical, modalities, see Holtz 1977 and Mitchell 1980.

The language has forsaken a vocal milieu, and a context of oral communication between persons, and commenced to take advantage of the expressive possibilities of technological space. (Kenner 1974: 39-40)<sup>38</sup>

The implications of footnotes defying oral delivery in the *mystères urbains* was that they were most probably skipped by people reading aloud, who recognized the problem they posed. Explanations would therefore be missed or delayed, and mysteries preserved.

In its defiance of oral recitation, the footnote also serves to foreground the materiality of the text, and the printing process behind its creation: ‘the printed book is no longer the record or depository of a story someone is conceived to be telling [...] but the essential artifact itself, declaring through its own inherent form the essential reality it means to show forth’ (Kenner 1974: 62). This has a number of effects. In leaning towards ‘the immutability of print’ rather than ‘the coercive evanescence of breath’ (Kenner 1974: 48), footnotes lent a legitimizing sense of permanence to the otherwise ephemeral domain of popular literature. The foregrounding of the print version also highlighted the essentially mechanical nature of the writing process.<sup>39</sup> Kenner, analysing Joyce’s *Ulysses*, refers to the ‘reduction of language to a finite number of interchangeable and permutable parts. We have the impression, as we read the Circe episode, that we have encountered all its ingredients before, only in a different arrangement’ (1974: 36). This mechanical image is particularly fitting in the context of popular literature, or as Kenner describes it, ‘the closed field of popular discourse, the pieces of which are phrases as the writer’s pieces are single words’ (1974: 95).

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<sup>38</sup> On ‘the antithesis between the personal matrix of human speech and the unyielding formalisms of the book as book’ in *Ulysses*, see Kenner (1974: 47-8).

<sup>39</sup> On the metaphor of the text as ‘machine’ see Dällenbach 1977: 126-7.

Thus recurring footnotes, pre-fabricated blocks of print (*Pantin* (Paris) and *la rousse* (la police), to give just a couple of examples, find their way into many of the *mystères*, often several times within the same text, or even the same page) evoke the ready-made stock of clichés, *topoi*, characters and scenarios which could be pieced together in varying combinations to create ‘new’ works.<sup>40</sup> The mechanization of literature, exemplified by the footnote, thus adds a positive spin to what Sainte-Beuve dismissed as ‘la littérature industrielle’ (1999 [1839]). Printing, predicated as it is on the rearrangement of constituent parts, in countless permutations, becomes an apposite metaphor for the boundless creative potential inherent to the rewriting process.<sup>41</sup>

### Dictionary distortions

One aspect of print culture that the *mystères urbains* parody insistently is lexicography. Again, we seem to be dealing with a metaphor of the writing process. As Kenner puts it: ‘Samuel Johnson may be described as the first writer to have examined individually in turn each of the words he employs, and without actually compiling dictionaries, writers have followed his example ever since’ (1974: 42-3). Thus Sue’s explanation and justification of his use of the term ‘aveuglement’ must be seen as an attempt to legitimize his work by portraying himself as a serious author, mindful of finding the *mot juste*:

L’aveuglement<sup>1</sup> mettra le meurtrier dans l’impossibilité de s’évader et de nuire désormais à sa personne...

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<sup>40</sup> On ‘cliché’ and ‘stéréotype’ as technical (printing) terms, rather than metaphors, see Amossy and Rosen 1982.

<sup>41</sup> Kenner uses a similar metaphor, that of the mosaic, to describe intertextuality in Pope: ‘the texts of past classics are as stable as mosaic tiles (having been quick-frozen by the printer), and [...] someone with fingernail scissors and a little bottle of paste can rearrange the general stock of literature to produce new beauties’ (1974: 41).

1. Nous maintenons ce barbarisme, l'expression de cécité s'appliquant à une maladie accidentelle ou à une infirmité naturelle ; tandis que ce dérivé du verbe aveugler rend mieux notre pensée, *l'action d'aveugler*.

(MP: 1020)

The lexicographical zeal which characterized the nineteenth century<sup>42</sup> was also a reaction to widespread social anxiety in the face of a disquietingly protean urban environment. Lexicography was a means of imposing order, of delimiting, systematizing and rationalizing.<sup>43</sup> While the translation of slang terms was certainly motivated in part by an anthropological impulse, as novels documenting non-standard types of language and slang lexicographies proliferated, intertextuality took over. So, in much the same way that the city came to be more of a literary creation than a reality,<sup>44</sup> the source of the urban language that novels purported to catalogue was increasingly literature rather than real life. For example, Zola's *Rougon-Macquart* cycle, and especially *L'Assommoir* (1876), was laced with slang terms lifted from Delvau's 1866 *Dictionnaire de la langue verte*.

In providing translations and definitions of foreign or unfamiliar terms, the *mystères urbains* imitate the conventions of the dictionary. But this is often done in a subversive or parodic manner. The items selected for translation and elucidation are the salacious and taboo terms which prescriptive dictionaries of the time often chose to ignore. While specialist slang dictionaries were not unusual, and became increasingly popular after the success of *Les Mystères de Paris*,<sup>45</sup> the spectacularization of slang by these footnotes, which are allowed to co-opt the primary text, is striking. The footnote, which we would expect to be 'more

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<sup>42</sup> See Jacques-Philippe Saint-Gérard's comprehensive website on nineteenth-century French language, especially the sections on dictionaries and lexicography:

<http://projects.chass.utoronto.ca/langueXIX/>

<sup>43</sup> See Frank 1963: 55 and Kenner 1974: xvi and 105.

<sup>44</sup> See II.2 above.

<sup>45</sup> See also Gauthier 2011: 178-184.

constrained than the primary text: [...] minimal, skeletal, succinct' (Benstock 1983: 204), rather than quietly explaining this material and relegating it to a brief and unobtrusive explanation which could well go unnoticed at the bottom of the page, actually ends up promoting and glamorizing it. To take an example from Vidocq's *Vrais Mystères de Paris*, page 4 of the 1876 edition contains no fewer than twenty-five notes explaining slang terminology (see Figure 1). The paratext dominates the page and commands our attention, prising us away from the primary text. Shields's description of *flânerie* could easily be used to describe the way in which the reader approaches these footnotes: '*flânerie* consists of strolling at an overtly leisurely pace, allowing oneself to be drawn by intriguing sights or to dawdle in interesting places' (1994: 65). The reader becomes like the idling *flâneur*, pausing to examine something that has piqued his interest. The spatial fragmentation of the page thus disrupts and delays the temporal flow of the narrative.<sup>46</sup> The overriding impression is one of suspense and indeed the footnotes perform a similar function to the staccato interruptions and interjections which create suspense in the primary text, as in the example shown in Appendix VIII.3.2, from Zaccone's *Nuits de Paris*, in which Lopès tells Fernande of Franck's secret love, but avoids all her efforts to find out any more information. The physical resemblance of this terse dialogue to the list of footnotes in Figure 1 is significant. But while readers fully expected, and indeed enjoyed, this sort of exaggerated, almost comical suspense in the main narrative, the suspense effect created by the paratext is all the more striking because it is quite the opposite of what we expect from footnotes: they do not aid, but rather impede, our

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<sup>46</sup> McKenzie refers to eighteenth-century objections to fragmented texts, in particular Locke's dislike of the eye being 'constantly disturb'd with loose Sentences, that by their standing and separation, appear as so many distinct Fragments' [McKenzie refers to Locke's 1707 *An Essay for the Understanding of St Paul's Epistles. By Consulting St Paul himself*] (1999: 56). In the *mystères*, the use of fragmentation is more deliberate and, as such, closer to that of (post)modernist texts.



understanding. When explanation is so fragmented, reader's reactions are postponed until the text can be apprehended as a whole.

Footnotes, at times farcically abundant, are elsewhere conspicuous by their absence, as in the following example from *Les Mystères du nouveau Paris*:

– Allons donc ! *des navets* ! tu serais déjà *ligotté* et *emballé* pour la *préfectanche*. C'est égal, je connais tous les *goualeux* du quartier et je n'ai jamais vu celui-là. Mais, dans la *rousse*, ils ont beau se *camoufler*, ils ne me mettent pas dedans. Il n'y en a qu'un qui serait capable de me *refaire*, et il ne travaille pas à *Pantin* (1) de ce moment-ci. Il est parti en Amérique pour mener la *filature* d'un *drogueur de la haute*, et on dit qu'on l'a *buté* là-bas.

(1) Paris.

(NOUV: 64)

Boisgobey's italics are a clear attempt to create a sense of *couleur locale* and to highlight the mysterious potential of language. This is summed up well by the anonymous *Dictionnaire complet de l'argot employé dans les 'Mystères de Paris'* (1844). The book presents itself as a guide to the underworld slang found in Sue's novel, while also confessing in its subtitle that it is 'Augmenté de la manière dont la pègre maquille son truque pour poissencher les pantres / les voleurs s'y prennent pour duper les honnêtes gens' and will thus play on and delight in the opacity of the terminology as much as elucidating it. The fact that the majority of Boisgobey's italicized terms are not footnoted, and moreover that this does not prevent us from understanding the text, serves to highlight the superficiality of the 'exoticism' at work here, and the pseudo-scholarly and redundancy of some of the other footnotes.

The dictionary model also has its limitations in that, beyond the semblance of order, the dictionary is characterized by a 'surrealist discontinuity' (Kenner 1974: 2). While each fragment, each constituent definition of the dictionary, is meaningful in isolation, there is no overarching narrative and, as such, no overall coherence. As

Gill puts it, with regard to the ‘taxonomic struggle’ which characterized the nineteenth century, ‘[t]he endless play of naming and renaming substituted for real analysis’ (2009: 256). Much has been written about the pivotal role of *Les Mystères de Paris* in the birth of the *roman policier*,<sup>47</sup> but the marked preoccupation with naming and description seen in the footnotes of these texts clearly highlights the absence of analysis and interpretation which would be so central to the genre (Kenner 1974: 91). An early episode in Boisgobey’s *Mystères du nouveau Paris* acts as a prelude to the prolific footnoting, while also hinting, via Marcel’s naïve self-assurance, that his knowledge of criminal slang amounts to little more than a showy spectacle of explanation, which in fact only scratches the surface of the underworld into which he will soon be catapulted (Appendix VIII.3.3). Marcel’s glib explanations, and the footnotes which perform a very similar function, dry up when Dominique goes missing after interrupting a burglary. Marcel will sit back and leave the genuinely probing analysis and interpretation to Chambras, the professional detective. The footnotes are thus characterized by an ironic superficiality, which is belied by their position, ‘buried’ under the primary text at the bottom of the page, and ultimately deliver much less than they promise.

### *Mise en abyme*

I will now turn to the formal implications of footnotes in the *mystères*. Lengthy footnotes, like the narrative technique of the *récit à tiroirs*, which embedded multiple sub-plots within the main narrative, were a means of generating income for

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<sup>47</sup> See, for example, Lavergne 2009: 14, 27, 171-96 and 206, and Messac 1929: 398-404.

*feuilletonistes*, who were paid per line.<sup>48</sup> Vareille's description of this technique in Féval's *Fils du Diable* (1846) is particularly evocative:

Aucune surprise à voir sur ce récit premier s'enter une foule de récits seconds, selon une technique de la dissémination, du branchement aléatoire et improbable, du « rhizome », de la germination, de la subordination et de la subordination à la subordination, de l'enchâssement et de l'enchâssement (démultipliable à l'infini) dans l'enchâssement, qui constitue peut-être, s'il faut en croire Derrida, Deleuze et Guattari,<sup>49</sup> l'essence d'une certaine modernité, mais également à coup sûr celle du feuilleton, qui, on l'a remarqué à d'innombrables reprises, est un récit à  *tiroirs*, susceptible d'être allongé quasiment sans fin grâce à une série d'intrigues dérivées qui se lient les unes aux autres. (1989: 76-77, emphasis in original)<sup>50</sup>

Unsurprisingly, such stories within the main story abound in the *mystères urbains* and there is even a diegetic nod to the *récit à tiroirs* technique in Sue's *Mystères de Paris*, in a scene where Rodolphe finds a letter hidden in the drawer of an antique desk, a discovery which introduces the sub-plot of Madame de Fermont and her daughter, left destitute following the death of Monsieur le baron de Fermont and the *abus de confiance* of Jacques Ferrand:

C'était un de ces anciens secrétaires en bois de rose, d'une forme presque triangulaire, fermé par un panneau antérieur qui, rabattu et soutenu par deux longues charnières de cuivre, sert de table à écrire. [...] il visitait machinalement les tiroirs les uns après les autres, lorsque, éprouvant quelque difficulté à ouvrir le dernier, et cherchant la cause de cet obstacle, il découvrit et attira à lui avec précaution une feuille de papier à moitié engagée entre le casier et le fond du meuble. (MP: 480)

<sup>48</sup> 'le feuilleton [...] est payé à la ligne, ce qui incite, bien sûr, les auteurs à allonger leurs romans : certains ne dépassent pas dix mille lignes, mais d'autres n'hésitent pas à aller au-delà de cent mille lignes ! Le prix de la ligne varie selon les quotidiens. Il est en général de 5 ou 10 centimes dans les journaux de province. Les quotidiens parisiens de moyen tirage ont des tarifs analogues [...] Mais certains feuilletons sont payés jusqu'à 1 franc la ligne dans les grands quotidiens parisiens (quelques-uns atteignent donc des prix de dizaines de milliers de francs)' (Thiesse 2000: 247-8).

<sup>49</sup> Vareille's reference is to Derrida 1967a and 1972a, and to Deleuze and Guattari 1976.

<sup>50</sup> See also Dumasy-Queffélec (1997: 241). Note that the rhizome is a usually subterranean stem which emits roots and shoots, making it an especially apt metaphor in this context.

The importance of footnotes seems to be in providing a typographic echo, a *mise en abyme*,<sup>51</sup> of this narrative structure, as in the example below, where the effect is amplified even further by the inclusion of parentheses and relative clauses within the footnote itself:

– Dieu soit béni ! s’écria Clémence en joignant les mains avec ferveur, je pourrai lui apprendre que sa protégée vit encore<sup>1</sup>.

1. Mme d’Harville, arrivée seulement de la veille, ignorait que Rodolphe avait découvert que la Goualeuse (qu’il croyait morte) était sa fille. Quelques jours auparavant, le prince, en écrivant à la marquise, lui avait appris les nouveaux crimes du notaire ainsi que les restitutions qu’il l’avait à faire. C’est par les soins de M. Badinot que l’adresse de Mme de Fermont, passage de la Brasserie, avait été découverte, et Rodolphe en avait aussitôt fait part à Mme d’Harville.

(MP: 1159)

The effect is to take us ever further away from the primary text, and this is a process repeated even where there is no embedded narrative as such, as in this example from Zadès’s *Mystères de Constantinople*, where the explanation of ‘Bosphore’ in the opening chapter, ends with a new question, which is left unanswered. Interestingly, the rather less problematic explanation of ‘caïque’ in the same sentence is provided in parentheses, rather than as a footnote:

Le 28 du mois de février de l’année 18..., vers dix heures du matin, un caïque (petite barque), arrivant du Bosphore (1) pénétrait dans les eaux de la Corne-d’Or, et allait s’arrêter à la descente d’une maison de Fanari dont l’élégance contrastait d’une manière frappante avec les habitations environnantes.

(1) Le mot Βόσπορος signifie *Passage du bœuf*, c’est-à-dire détroit qu’un bœuf a traversé à la nage. Pourquoi, contrairement à son étymologie, écrit-on *Bosphore*, qui veut dire *Porteur du bœuf*, au lieu de *Bospore* ?

(CONST: 1)

<sup>51</sup> According to Dällenbach, ‘est mise en abyme toute enclave entretenant une relation de similitude avec l’œuvre qui la contient’ (1977: 18). While Dällenbach urges us to look beyond the obvious understanding of ‘abyme’ (‘abyss’), pointing out that the term can in fact refer to the high as well as the deep, the primary connotations he evokes are clearly relevant in the context of the *mystères urbains*: ‘conformément à l’étymologie, la topique de l’abyme se doit d’être celle du sans-fond, du tréfonds, du vertigineux et de l’enfoui, [...] les entrailles de la terre, les enfers, les cavernes et les gouffres [...]’ (1977: 227).

We are left with the impression that the footnote itself requires a footnote and so on and so forth. Benstock remarks the same phenomenon in *Finnegans Wake*, where the cryptic footnote which appears to provide explanation actually plunges us into another discourse, with ‘certainly no fewer mysteries waiting to be footnoted, than the central text to which it refers’ (1983: 211-2). Benstock goes on to explain that:

What we need [...] is documentation for the documentation, the chapter having set up a pattern of interlocking relations that lead further and further from their source (the text) in search of other sources (outside the text) that are themselves housed in texts. The notes, which are elliptic, polysemic, multidirectional, “solve” no textual problem: they do not fill the various gaps that the text creates, and ultimately the reader must fill in the spaces. Stated differently, the notes do not keep the text within its boundaries, locked into its narrative form; they insist on taking it always “out of bounds,” taking the reader away with them. They resist the very authority they purportedly represent. (1983: 212)

The *Dictionnaire complet de l'argot employé dans les 'Mystères de Paris'* would seem to confirm the inadequacy of the footnotes, and to corroborate this need for ‘documentation for the documentation’.

We are dealing with Dällenbach’s ‘*réduplication à l’infini* (fragment qui entretient avec l’œuvre qui l’inclut un rapport de similitude et qui enchâsse lui-même un fragment qui..., et ainsi de suite)’ (1977: 51, emphasis in original). The effect of this vertiginous *mise en abyme* is to call into question the very definition of text and paratext.<sup>52</sup> If what we believe to be the paratext starts to behave as a primary text, demanding a footnote of its own, the implication is that all texts exist in an endless chain of referentiality, which makes all paratexts also primary texts, and vice versa. So, just as the footnote is appended to the *roman-feuilleton* (seen at the bottom right

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<sup>52</sup> ‘Prefaces, afterwords, and footnotes are thus obvious appendages that comment on and participate in the principal text that engenders them; they call into question the whole notion of margin, border, boundary, edge, and the various layers and infoldings of the text; they put into relief the question, What constitutes a “text”?’ (Benstock 1983: 220).

of Figure 2), the *roman-feuilleton* appears as a ‘footnote’ to the newspaper page, situated ‘au rez-de-chaussée’ and separated from the rest of the printed page by a symbolic horizontal line (Thiesse 2000) (again, see Figure 2).<sup>53</sup> Similarly, the newspaper itself (the conservative *Journal des Débats*, whose ideology had little in common with Sue’s burgeoning socialism) may be the derivative ‘footnote’ of a larger, more meaningful and authoritative text.<sup>54</sup> The effect is one of metalepsis, a breaking of the boundaries separating otherwise distinct levels of narrative. As Genette puts it, we are dealing with a ‘frontière mouvante mais sacrée entre deux mondes : celui où l’on raconte, celui que l’on raconte’, with the result that ‘l’extradiégétique est peut-être toujours déjà diégétique, et [...] le narrateur et ses narrataires, c’est-à-dire vous et moi, appartenons peut-être encore à quelque récit’ (1972: 245).<sup>55</sup>

The essential ambiguity of the ‘para-’ prefix<sup>56</sup> sums up the blurred boundaries between text and paratext.<sup>57</sup> As McHale explains, with reference to the postmodernist split text, the absence of any obvious order of reading in texts such as these means that the reader is obliged to attempt a simultaneous reading, taking multiple aspects of the text in at a single glance (1987: 190-2).<sup>58</sup> Again, the assumed hierarchy of text and paratext is called into question, and we are reminded of Lynch’s multi-purpose urban ‘edges’, which are characterized by a similar

<sup>53</sup> On postmodernist parodies of the layout of the newspaper page, see McHale 1987: 182.

<sup>54</sup> The idea is one which has been mooted by a number of theorists and critics. For Derrida, for example, the text ‘ne serait plus, dès lors, un corpus fini d’écriture, un contenu cadré dans un livre ou dans ses marges mais un réseau différentiel, un tissu de traces renvoyant indéfiniment à de l’autre, référées à d’autres traces différentielles’ (2003: 118). Michel Butor makes some strikingly similar observations, explaining that ‘Le symbolisme externe du roman tend à se réfléchir dans un symbolisme interne, certaines parties jouant, par rapport à l’ensemble, le même rôle que celui-ci par rapport à la réalité’ (1960: 10). Butor also refers to ‘l’inachèvement constitutif de l’ouvrage qui apparaît comme le fragment d’une œuvre plus vaste toujours en devenir’ (1968 : 20). To return to my opening analogy, the urban equivalent of this ever-growing text would no doubt be the sprawling conurbation.

<sup>55</sup> See Benstock 1983: 210 and 224.

<sup>56</sup> See quotation p. 27 (Miller 1979: 219).

<sup>57</sup> See also Benstock 1983: 223.

<sup>58</sup> On the aspiration toward simultaneity in modernist writing, see Frank 1963.

versatility: '[Charles Street in Boston] acts ambiguously either as linear node, edge, or path for various people at various times' (Lynch 1960: 65).

### **Text and paratext, fiction and truth**

The blurring of the boundaries between text and paratext becomes particularly interesting in those *mystères* which make specific claims of truth or authenticity. As McHale explains, with any paratext which foregrounds a text's materiality, we encounter 'an ontological hesitation or oscillation between the fictional world and the real-world object – the material book' (1987: 184). The boundary between the fictional text and the paratext which, as part of the 'real-world object' should be both factual and extra-referential, is deliberately vague:

La mine [...] fut abandonnée d'abord, mais elle fut reprise huit jours après par un Français qui s'associa avec un Américain, possesseur de cinq mille dollars, de quoi acheter des machines. Au bout d'un an, le Français vendait sa part quatre millions (1).

(1) L'histoire de la mine *Eureka* est authentique d'un bout à l'autre.

(NOUV: 307)

Here, Boisgobey stresses the authenticity of his story, but provides the reader with no extra-textual evidence to support his claim. A further example is even more tantalizing: the author could, he claims, name the Frenchman involved in this true story (note the significant use of the conditional tense), and yet does not do so:

La guerre était déclarée. Elle se poursuivit à la fois sous terre et au grand jour. Tantôt les Allemands et les Mexicains d'Atkins poussaient des galeries jusque sous les nôtres et tâchaient de nous asphyxier ou de nous faire sauter avec de la poudre (1)...

(1) Tous ces détails sont authentiques et l'auteur pourrait nommer le Français qui fut le héros de ces aventures.

(NOUV: 287)

Vidocq makes many similar claims, but also stops short of providing specific details, supposedly so as not to overwhelm his text with footnotes:

Que l'on ne nous accuse pas de broyer du noir dans le seul but d'effrayer nos lecteurs ; nous l'avons déjà dit et nous le répétons, la plupart des événements que nous rapportons dans ce livre sont vrais, rigoureusement vrais, et si nous n'avions pas la crainte d'augmenter les notes déjà si nombreuses de notre ouvrage, nous pourrions presque toujours citer une autorité à l'appui de ce que nous avançons. (VRAIS II: 52)

When specific sources are invoked, the mere mention of them would have probably been enough to satisfy a suspicious reader. The imperative mood used by Vidocq in the example below seems to be a challenge to the reader and would no doubt have been deemed 'proof' in itself of the text's authenticity:<sup>59</sup>

C'était entre *Oculi et Latere* de l'année 18... (2)

(2) On appelle ainsi les deuxième et troisième dimanches de carême, ce nom leur vient du premier mot de *l'introït* de chaque dimanche. Voyez Mathieu Laensberg, consultez même au besoin le bedeau de votre paroisse.

(VRAIS I: 164)

Other genuinely extra-textual references are often quite intractable, if we consider the social class and education of many readers,<sup>60</sup> as in the following example from Sue's *Mystères de Paris*. The Latin quotations (the italics point to another example of a footnote requiring its own footnote) and allusions to scholarly literature bear testament to Sue's medical background, but must have been lost on many of his

<sup>59</sup> As Genette notes, Tolstoy, in his preface to *War and Peace*, makes similarly elliptical references to sources, while stressing his readiness to produce them should anyone dare to challenge him (1987: 214).

<sup>60</sup> As Benstock explains, 'Wayne Booth has probably best described this process: "The author creates, in short, an image of himself and another image of his reader; he makes his reader, as he makes his second self, and the most successful reading is one in which the created selves, author and reader, can find complete agreement' [Booth 1961: 138]. [...] the notion suggests an audience that shares the author's social class, education, political attitudes, and even a set of fictional and critical experiences derived through reading' (Benstock 1983: 222).



readers, as schooling would not be obligatory until the education laws of Jules Ferry passed under the Third Republic, and who, in any case, would doubtless have been unable to obtain the documents in question:

Arétée<sup>1</sup> l'a dit, la plupart de ceux qui sont atteints de cette étrange et effroyable maladie périssent presque toujours le septième jour... et il y a aujourd'hui six jours que l'inférieure créole a allumé le feu inextinguible qui dévore cet homme...

1. *Nam plerumque in septima die hominem consumit* (Arétée). Voir aussi la traduction de Baldassar. (Cas. med., lib. III, Salacitas nitro curata.) Voir aussi les admirables pages d'Ambroise Paré sur le satyriasis, cette étrange et effrayante maladie qui ressemble tant, dit-il, à un châtiment de Dieu.

(MP: 1122)

These oblique references to extra-textual sources create an impression of textual authority, but ultimately lead us nowhere other than back to the text itself.<sup>61</sup> The *mystères* were therefore inward-looking texts which, by repeatedly making half-hearted gestures in the direction of extra-referentiality, but never pursuing it to its logical conclusion, ultimately eschewing outside sources, duped many readers into thinking they were dealing with fact rather than fiction.<sup>62</sup> This referential 'wild goose chase' is another way of creating delay, distraction and suspense in the *mystères*.

Benstock sums up the way in which fictional texts repurpose the scholarly footnote:

The traces of the scholarly tradition are always present in the fictional context that employs them, present "under erasure," as Derrida would suggest, making the text a palimpsest that both hides and reveals all its previous sources and all the various uses to which the language has already been put. Thus these notes play on the extension of authority provided by the scholarly apparatus – offering the illusion of a receding chain of previous and multiple

<sup>61</sup> See Benstock on notes in *Tristram Shandy* which 'undermine the traditional purpose of scholarly notations in texts to establish textual authority by referring to an extratextual source. Here the notes turn inward on the narrative itself and subvert its status and credibility' (1983: 209).

<sup>62</sup> On the abundant correspondence received by Sue which bore testament to the inability of many readers to distinguish between fact and fiction in *Les Mystères de Paris*, see Prendergast 2003.

references while also establishing the notational hierarchy out of which arises the dialogue that divides the text against itself. (1983: 219)

This appropriation of the scholarly footnote's authority, coupled with a simultaneous rejection of its clarity and extra-referentiality, is significant in the *mystères urbains*. Just as the corpus as a whole is marked by its hypertextuality, by the rewriting and recycling of texts, here within those texts, *en abyme*, we see a rewriting of paratextual conventions.

### **A perplexing polyphony**

As my examination of extra-referentiality has brought me back full-circle to the text, I will now turn to the question of dialogue between the text's various 'voices'. Footnotes constitute a distinctive 'voice' within texts, whose interjections are announced by various typographic conventions such as superscript or bracketed numerals, location at the bottom of the page and reduced font size (Benstock 1983: 209). Kenner describes the footnote as a 'ventriloqual gadget [...] something analogous with counterpoint: a way of speaking in two voices at once, or of ballasting or modifying or even bombarding with exceptions [the writer's] own discourse without interrupting it' (1974: 40). This would appear to be how footnotes function in the *mystères urbains*. The annotative voice, by qualifying, amending and correcting the other textual voices, calls into question their authority and reliability. The challenge can be to a mimetic voice,<sup>63</sup> as in the following example, where the footnote explains to the reader that Monsieur Pipelet's mysterious encounter with two fantastical creatures has been little more than a practical joke organized by his

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<sup>63</sup> I draw here on Ross's useful distinction between mimetic and textual voice (1929), as used by Benstock (1983: 208).

mischievous neighbour Cabrion. The note counters Pipelet's melodramatic exaggerations with a matter-of-fact sobriety:

– Alors, reprit Alfred en devenant cramoisi, les manteaux tombent et qu'est-ce que je vois ? Deux espèces de sirènes ou de nymphes, sans autres vêtements qu'une tunique de feuillage, la tête aussi couronnée de feuillage ; j'étais pétrifié... Alors toutes deux s'avancent vers moi en me tendant leurs bras, comme pour m'engager à m'y précipiter<sup>1</sup>...

1. Deux danseuses de la Porte-Saint-Martin, amies de Cabrion, vêtues de maillot et un costume de ballet.

(MP: 900)

Challenges to the narrative voice of the primary text create a good deal more confusion for the reader. In the following example, from the episode in which several characters, including Madame Georges, visit Morel in Bicêtre, the note admits the implausibility of the narrative, undercutting the authority of the narrative voice:

– Monsieur, dit Mme Georges<sup>1</sup> à M. Herbin, j'ai cru pouvoir accompagner mon fils et ma belle-fille, quoique je ne connaisse pas M. Morel.

1. Nous savons que les femmes sont très difficilement admises dans les maisons d'aliénés : mais nous demandons pardon au lecteur de cette irrégularité nécessaire à notre fable.

(MP: 1202)

The effect of these conflicting appeals to the reader is one of bewildering polyphony. The reader is left to contend with not only the mysteries of the *fable*, or what is actually happening in the story, but also the mysteries of the *sujet*, or the telling of that story: 'la manière dont l'auteur présente cette fable', according to Todorov (1971: 58). The 'author', the authoritative voice, is often difficult to disentangle from the competing melee. An inconsistent use of pronouns in the footnotes adds to the confusion. Sue alternates between stressing the demarcation between himself and the

reader (*'Le lecteur se souvient peut-être que [...]'* (MP: 832, my emphasis); *'Le nom que j'ai l'honneur de porter [...]'* (1133, my emphasis)) and playing down the same demarcation, by using inclusive pronouns (*'On verra plus tard les mœurs de ces pirates parisiens'* (515, my emphasis); *'Quelques jours après avoir écrit ces lignes, nous relisons le Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène [...]'* (646, my emphasis)).

But what is arguably most interesting in *Les Mystères de Paris* is that Sue not only creates an annotative voice which qualifies the voice of the narrator of the primary text, but that that annotative voice also qualifies itself as the book progresses. The footnotes thus form a narrative in their own right, documenting Sue's conversion to socialism. The early notes are characterized by a foppish disdain for his unsavoury subject matter:

– Bonsoir, *Chourineur*<sup>1</sup>.

Cet homme, repris de justice, avait été ainsi surnommé au bagne.

1. Chourineur : donneur de coups de couteau. (Nous n'abuserons pas long-temps de cet affreux langage d'*argot*, nous en donnerons seulement quelques spécimens caractéristiques.)

(MP: 33)

But Sue's footnotes soon became a platform for his growing preoccupation with social justice and for a series of ideological digressions on topics including, to give just a few examples, workers' salaries (MP: 957), the dangers faced by those exposed to 'blanc de céruse' (white lead) (984) and the scourge of the 'mont-de-piété' (a state-owned pawnbroker) (1091). These later notes were evidence of the serious political engagement which would culminate in Sue's election to the Assembly under the Second Republic and his exile following the coup d'État of 1851.

By asserting its autonomy in this way, the footnote is once again behaving more like a primary text than a paratext. Sue's evolving ideology ensures that the footnote is characterized by a complexity and opacity evident not just in isolated instances, but sustained throughout the novel.

In conclusion, footnotes in the *mystères urbains*, by attempting to fix and codify oral language and yet simultaneously defying an oral reading, foreground the materiality of the text, and the mechanical nature of the writing process, particularly in the context of popular fiction. The use of dictionary conventions lends a semblance of order to the texts, but a referentiality which is exaggerated and inconsistent results in fragmentation and delay. By replicating *en abyme* the multiple layers of the mysteries' narrative structure, the footnotes complicate the text, where we would expect them to simplify it, compelling us to challenge our assumptions about the boundaries of text and paratext, fiction and fact. The addition of an increasingly autonomous annotative voice adds another layer of complexity. We fully expect the footnote, in line with scholarly conventions, to clarify the mysteries of the text, but this expectation is repeatedly subverted by these problematic paratexts, which pollute the text and muddy the waters even further. Footnotes in the *mystères urbains* thus emerge as texts in their own right, and, appropriately, texts which are just as obscure and opaque as the underworld of the main narrative.



Figure 1

## LES VRAIS MYSTÈRES DE PARIS.

commencer à *ragpoter* (1) partout ; la *camelotte* (2) est ici, c'est sûr ; il faut la trouver.

De nouvelles recherches furent tout aussi infructueuses que celles qui venaient d'être faites.

— *Niente* (3), dit *Coco-Desbraisés*, qui paraissait en proie à une violente colère.

— *Foi de bon zigue* (4), répondit *Délicat* ; si tu veux, nous allons *coquer la rifle à la piole* (5), puisque nous ne pouvons rien trouver.

— Ça serait pas juste, y ne sont peut-être pas les propriétaires.

— Pourquoi que ça n' serait pas eux, puisque l'un de ces *grinches* (6) est marquis, et que l'autre est son intendant ? C'est-y drôle que des nobles qui sont nobles soient des *pégres* (7), et des *chouettes pégres* encore (8) !

— C'est vrai que c'est drôle ; car s'ils sont *riflards* (9), pour quoi qu'ils risquent leur peau pour *poisser* (10) ?

— Dis donc, si c'étaient des *raillies* (11) ?

— En v'la une de *loftitude* (12). Si c'étaient des *rousses* (13), est-ce qu'ils seraient marquis et intendant ? Ah ! que j'*marveronne* (14) de n'avoir pas pu les *remoucher* (15) !

— As-tu remarqué comme ils parlent ? qu'on dirait des *charabias* ou des *Gascons*.

— En tout cas, y sont vicieux, les coquins, d'avoir si bien *planqué* (16) leur *camelotte* (17).

— T'as raison ; mais quand on est si de la *bonne* (18), s'exposer à aller au *pré* (19), c'est *pacifionner* (20).

— C'est peut-être une passion ; mais quand on a des *chopins de cinquante mille balles à fourguer* (21), on peut bien risquer quelque chose. C'est-ly ça un *grinchissage* (22) ! Sont-ly heureux les scélérats !

— T'auras beau te *morfiller le dardant* (23), tu n'empêcheras pas que ça ne soit comme ça ; l'eau va toujours à la rivière.

Tout en conversant, *Délicat* et *Coco-Desbraisés* avaient parcouru la maison dans tous les sens ; mais, à leur grand regret, ils n'avaient rien trouvé de bon à prendre ; seulement *Délicat*, ayant découvert dans une remise une redingote et un pantalon oubliés depuis longtemps et couverts de poussière, voulut absolument s'en vêtir.

*Délicat* et *Coco-Desbraisés* employèrent, pour sortir du pavillon, le moyen qui leur avait servi pour y entrer ; et, après avoir suivi quelques instants un petit sentier tracé à travers les terres labourées, ils se trouvèrent sur la route pavée qui conduit à Paris.

— Nous avons un bon ruban de queue d'ici à *Pantin* (24), dit *Coco-Desbraisés*.

— C'est égal, répondit *Délicat* ; je n'ai plus *taffetas du vert* (25), et je puis aller jusqu'au bout du monde, maintenant

que j'ai un *montant* (1) et une bonne *pebure* (2) sur les *andosses* (3).

Les deux drôles continuèrent leur route.

Le marquis et son intendant, qui avaient pris le chemin de fer pour revenir à Paris, se quittèrent à la station ; l'intendant était monté dans un cabriolet, et le marquis avait continué sa route à pied, le visage à moitié couvert par un cache-nez et le corps bien enveloppé dans son manteau. Arrivé sur le boulevard de l'Hôpital, il s'arrêta quelques minutes ; puis il revint sur ses pas. Après avoir recommencé plusieurs fois la même manœuvre ; il entra dans une maison sans portier, dont la porte était fermée par une serrure à secret ; il gravit lestement quatre étages, et entra dans une petite pièce carrée dont il ferma soigneusement la porte.

Sans perdre de temps, il quitta le costume assez élégant dont il était couvert pour se revêtir de celui que portent habituellement les patrons ou conducteurs de bateaux ; cela fait, il sortit, et après avoir traversé le quai, il descendit sur la berge, puis détacha un bateau du piquet auquel il était retenu, et s'abandonna au cours de la Seine. Arrivé à la hauteur de la place de l'Hôtel-de-Ville, et après avoir solidement amarré son bateau à un des gros anneaux de fer scellés dans le parapet, il s'engagea dans l'étroite et sombre ruelle à laquelle on a donné le nom de la rue des Teinturiers.

## II

## La mère Sans-Refus.

La rue de la Tannerie est une des plus boueuses, des plus sales du vieux Paris.

La plus ignoble de ses maisons était alors occupée par un de ces établissements de tolérance dont les vitres sont toujours enduites d'une couche épaisse de blanc d'Espagne ; on a cependant ménagé dans une de celles de la boutique, qui forme à elle seule le rez-de-chaussée, un petit espace circulaire, dans lequel apparaît souvent un œil provocateur, chargé d'indiquer aux passants inexpérimentés l'industrie exercée rue de la Tannerie n° 31.

Cette boutique est divisée en deux parties, séparées par une cloison jadis vitrée, dont les carreaux, depuis longtemps brisés, ont été remplacés par du papier huilé ; la boutique, proprement dite, est garnie seulement de quelques tables couvertes de toile cirée, qui ne sont jamais essuyées si ce n'est par les manches des consommateurs, de quelques chaises et de plusieurs grossiers tabourets. Le comptoir sur lequel se carrent quelques bouteilles, des verres ébréchés et une série de mesures d'étain, est formé d'un vieux bas de buffet en chêne vermoulu ; le fauteuil de *Madame*, placé derrière, est recouvert d'une basane, qui de noir est presque devenue rouge ; ce fauteuil a perdu un de ses bras dans une des batailles qui se sont livrées en ce lieu, et des nombreuses blessures qui le couvrent, s'échappent le crin et la bourre qu'il renferme dans ses flancs.

Ce modeste trône est occupé par une femme âgée d'environ cinquante-cinq ans, grande, maigre, les yeux d'un bleu pâle ; un usage immodéré du tabac a considérablement élargi les méplats de son nez long et pointu ; sa bouche, d'une grandeur plus qu'ordinaire, n'est garnie que de dents noires et mal rangées ; ses lèvres sont pâles et minces ; quelques poils gris sont mêlés à sa chevelure rousse, elle est coiffée d'un mouchoir rouge posé en marmotte ; les pendeloques qui garnissent ses oreilles sont formées de brillants assez beaux ; ses

- (1) Culotte.
- (2) Redingote.
- (3) Épaules.

- (1) Fouiller.
- (2) Marchandise.
- (3) Rien.
- (4) Camarade.
- (5) Mettre le feu à la maison.
- (6) Voleurs.
- (7) Voleurs.
- (8) Bons voleurs.
- (9) Richards.
- (10) Voler.
- (11) Mouchards.
- (12) Bêtise.
- (13) Mouchards.
- (14) Bisque.
- (15) Les regarder.
- (16) Caché.
- (17) Marchandise.
- (18) Si riche.
- (19) Aux galères.
- (20) C'est être fou.
- (21) Des vols de cinquante mille francs à vendre au receleur.
- (22) Un vol.
- (23) Te manger le cœur.
- (24) Paris.
- (25) Plus peur du froid.









### III.3 – ILLUSTRATIONS

Having demonstrated that footnotes in the *mystères urbains*, by promoting a spatial (rather than temporal) apprehension of the text,<sup>64</sup> showcase the text's potential for self-illustration,<sup>65</sup> I would now like to consider the role of illustrations proper. An exceptionally large number of illustrated editions of Sue's text were produced in his lifetime alone. Witkowski refers to 'une série d'éditions illustrées dont l'importance est probablement unique dans l'histoire mondiale du livre : en se limitant aux illustrations françaises contemporaines de Süe on compte en effet près de mille deux cents images originales' (1992: 153-4). The research questions raised by such a large and rich corpus are far too numerous to be afforded an exhaustive exploration here.<sup>66</sup> Indeed, such an undertaking would make for a lengthy and fascinating research project in its own right. So with the limitations of this study in mind, and also taking into account the emphases and conclusions of the previous sections of this chapter, I will use this section to present a case study of the Rouff illustrated edition of *Les Mystères de Paris*, making reference, where pertinent, to other illustrated editions. The edition in question dates from 1885 and is illustrated by Oswaldo Tofani, a French illustrator of Florentine origin (Witkowski 1992: 157). First, a brief introduction to the topic, as well as an acknowledgement of the methodological implications of analysing non-textual material, is called for.

Illustrations are a feature of the text characterized by their marginality and so, just like prefaces and footnotes, deserve special attention in the context of this study.

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<sup>64</sup> As Nicol puts it, 'on ne *lit* pas une image comme des mots : quand un texte se donne à lire de manière linéaire, l'image est appréhendée globalement [...] depuis le *Laocoon* de Lessing, une frontière sépare l'art du temps de l'art de l'espace' (2005: 224-5, emphasis in original).

<sup>65</sup> See Kenner 1974: 56-7 and McHale 1987: 186.

<sup>66</sup> Witkowski suggests that 'les illustrations exogènes' are a particularly rich vein, stating that '[l]'exploration de ce domaine que je soupçonne riche mais d'un accès laborieux en raison de la variété des sources possibles, ma [*sic*] paraît à peine entamée' (1992: 174). See also Witkowski 1991.

The marginality of illustrations is reflected in the grammatical composition of the term ‘roman illustré’. Leduc-Adine points out ‘l’incidence de l’adjectif « illustré » sur le nom « roman », la dépendance hiérarchique de l’image par rapport au texte. En effet, à quelques exceptions près, c’est toujours le texte qui génère l’image’ (1992: 414).<sup>67</sup> Nicol explains that the marginality of illustrations is both physical and metaphorical: ‘l’image a longtemps été en marge (au sens propre autant que par métaphore), comme si, à son contact, le texte, légitime occupant du lieu, courait un danger’ (2005: 221). Much like the text, the image underwent a process of industrialization in the nineteenth century (Hamon 2001: 13 and 438), and the plethora of ‘mauvaises images’<sup>68</sup> produced as a result heralded a new relationship between the two media and something of a displacement of the margins to the centre in terms of the pre-eminence of illustrations. Eugène Pelletan, in *La Nouvelle Babylone* (1862), was particularly critical of the insidiousness of the image and the way it appeared to be usurping the territory of the text (Hamon 2001: 247).<sup>69</sup>

The struggle for supremacy between text and image was played out in the city just as much as on the printed page: ‘Le livre n’est pas seul en jeu, ni le journal. Ce sont les murs et les rues de la ville, ainsi que les murs de l’appartement, qui se couvrent d’images et d’objets figuratifs’ (Hamon 2001: 22). Hamon compares the printed page to the urban ‘affiche’ (2001: 151) and the act of reading to the activity of ‘flânerie’ (2011: 249):

La rue, comme fabrique d’images à voir sollicitant l’œil du flâneur, est en concurrence avec la littérature, comme fabrique d’images à lire sollicitant l’imaginaire du lecteur. Cette dernière n’a donc, comme choix, pour la

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<sup>67</sup> Bernard makes a very similar point with regard to the *roman historique* (see Chapter V below): ‘l’historique est en position secondaire et adjectivale par rapport au « roman », substantif, substantiel et dominant’ (1996: 64).

<sup>68</sup> See Hamon 2001: 301.

<sup>69</sup> On the ‘invasion’ and ‘envahissement’ of industrial images (note the fittingly topographic terms), see also Hamon 2001: 281 and 283.

neutraliser ou l'acclimater, que d'en faire son repoussoir ou de l'instituer comme son modèle. (2001: 181)

The reader, like the flâneur, became 'une sorte de machine à aspirer et refouler des images' (Hamon 2001: 23) whose preoccupation with all things visual<sup>70</sup> posed a threat to spiritual and intellectual life and was symptomatic of the 'décadence' which Pelletan so decried (Hamon 2001: 29). The speed and superficiality of the modern city was reflected in the new type of reading which images demanded, producing 'un lecteur « pressé » qui désormais « feuillette » au lieu de lire' (Hamon 2001: 39, emphasis in original).<sup>71</sup>

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the suspicion surrounding images,<sup>72</sup> Eugène Sue appears to have been reticent about the publication of illustrated editions of *Les Mystères de Paris*. In an 1843 letter to Sue, subsequently used as a preface to the Administration de Librairie illustrated edition of *Les Mystères de Paris* (1851a), Th. Burette wrote:

Votre succès vous trouble, vous en avez peur, et vous me demandez s'il faut continuer sous une forme nouvelle qui le soutienne et le répande plus brillant encore sur le grand chemin de la popularité. Pour vous l'*illustration* n'est qu'un accessoire qui vient poliment offrir à votre livre une auréole dont il a nul besoin, fort qu'il est de lui-même, et peignant de main de maître, avec une si grande vérité de couleur et de dessin, qu'il fait passer à l'état réel toutes les fantaisies de votre imagination. [...] – Eugène Sue, vous qui contez

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<sup>70</sup> This is a characteristically urban phenomenon: 'Simmel wrote that 'interpersonal relations in big cities are distinguished by a marked preponderance of the activity of the eye over the activity of the ear'' (Prendergast 1992: 19). The phenomenon was typical of Paris in particular, where defining the numerous types of citydweller was made possible by 'l'hypertrophie d'un organe, l'œil, « l'œil du parisien » [the reference is to Balzac's *Un Gaudissart de la rue de Richelieu* from *Le Diable à Paris* (1845)]' (Hamon 2001: 23). Invoking Balzac's *Monographie du rentier*, Hamon goes on to make a link between this visually biased approach to the city and an equivalent approach to the text, referring to 'le siècle d'un nouveau lecteur [...] qui, comme le flâneur [...] ne semble plus « exister que par les yeux »' (2001: 248). See also Hamon 2001: 155, 168-9 and 247-8.

<sup>71</sup> See also Hamon 2001: 41 and 256.

<sup>72</sup> Pelletan's 'iconophobie' was indeed widespread. Hamon notes the aversion of Flaubert and the Goncourts to illustrations (2001: 28 and 168-9). See also Leduc-Adine 1992: 410. The view of illustration as edification ('Rappelons à nouveau que l'un des sens du mot « illustration » est de désigner, au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle, quelqu'un d'illustre, de célèbre' (Hamon 2001: 248)) appears to have been overshadowed by this iconophobic trend.

si bien, contez-nous donc la fin de vos mystères ?  
(1851a: 2, emphasis in original)

As Burette evidently realized, the illustration could function as a palimpsest, transforming and thereby prolonging the economic success of popular novels.<sup>73</sup> The way in which the image functioned as a palimpsest can also be explained in terms of its urban context, where the layering of media, as well as messages, was common. Hamon makes repeated reference to the juxtaposition and superimposition of text and image in the city, as in the following example:

Une page du roman de P. Adam, *Le mystère des foules* (1895), qui décrit une campagne électorale boulangiste dans une ville de l'est de la France, évoque cette sursémiotisation d'une rue, où se juxtaposent, en palimpseste multicolore ou en voisinages incongrus, de l'écrit, des images, des statues. (2001: 149)<sup>74</sup>

Hamon compares this physical layering to the literary technique of 'collage' used by the likes of Rimbaud and Laforgue (2001: 160 and 181). We are also reminded of Barthes's description of the polyphonic layering and blurring of the multiple messages (linguistic, coded iconic (denoted) and non-coded iconic (connoted)) within a given image:

Le message linguistique se laisse facilement séparer des deux autres messages ; mais ces messages-là ayant la même substance (iconique), dans quelle mesure a-t-on le droit de les distinguer ? [...] des deux messages iconiques, le premier est en quelque sorte *imprimé sur* le second [...]. (Barthes 1964: 1420, my emphasis)

The notion of the palimpsest in the context of images must thus be seen as both literal and literary, both physical and metaphorical.

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<sup>73</sup> The commercial function of illustrated editions is also acknowledged by Thibault 1992: 147 and Leduc-Adine 1992: 423.

<sup>74</sup> On the image and the palimpsest (in the city in particular), see also Hamon 2001: 160, 181, 437 and 438.

As far as methodology is concerned, in his conclusion to *Seuils*, Genette refers to the domain of illustrations as an ‘immense continent’ (1987: 409), the study of which ‘excède les moyens du simple ‘littéraire’’ (1987: 410).<sup>75</sup> A methodological approach which acknowledges the special status of illustrations is therefore imperative. My own approach will draw on a remark made by Hamon, bemoaning the fact that the image is all too often considered in isolation rather than in terms of its interactions with other semiotic systems: ‘les spécialistes de l’histoire des images ont parfois un peu trop de tendance [...] à l’isoler de son contexte sémiotique (intersémiotique) général, à l’isoler des autres systèmes de représentation qui passent par d’autres supports et canaux’ (2001: 16).<sup>76</sup> So as not to fall into this trap, my analysis will focus on the narrative function of the illustrations and the captions which accompany them, looking in particular at their participation in a dialectic of showing and concealing.

Leduc-Adine makes another important point about illustrations, which is worth noting before I embark on my analysis:

il me paraît nécessaire de rappeler ce statut spécifique de l’icône illustrative et de considérer comme un peu imprudent de l’inclure dans « le destin hypertextuel » du roman avec tous « les rewritings, les transpositions modales, génériques, diégétiques, thématiques qu’un texte peut inspirer »,<sup>77</sup> sauf évidemment si l’on s’en tient à une étude sociocritique de la réception. (1992: 410)

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<sup>75</sup> See also Baguley 1992: 141 and Dousteyssier-Khoze 2004: 83-4.

<sup>76</sup> Leduc-Adine agrees that ‘l’illustration repose sur un rapport de réflexivité intersémiotique, puisqu’elle tente d’établir un système de communication entre texte et icône’ (1992: 413).

<sup>77</sup> Leduc-Adine’s qualification is a direct riposte to Baguley 1992: 139.

If illustrated editions are to be treated on a par with other hypertextual transformations, then their role as critical reaction to the hypotext<sup>78</sup> is clearly not to be underestimated.

### Scene selection and treatment

I would like to begin by considering the scenes selected as the subject of the illustrations and the ways in which these contribute to a playful vacillation between showing and concealing. Grivel (1992: 125-6) makes an important distinction between text and image, describing the former as ‘une machine de vision’ and ‘un continuum visuel mou’ (1992: 126) which, by constantly progressing and evolving, defies the arrival at a single, conclusive and definitive mental image:

La vision textuelle mentale s’élabore sur une limite : la lecture est une *vitesse de mots* qui ne permet pas [...] la réalisation complète ou même autrement que silhouettée des mots en images. C’est le *régime du récit* qui veut ça : « montrer », mais empêcher de regarder. La « visualisation » textuelle est ainsi en quelque sorte continuellement programmée, mais systématiquement suspendue. (1992: 126, emphases in original)

Illustrations, as discrete, physical images, the perception of which is immediate (Cambray 2007: 289), should provide a means of pinning down the elusive mental images created by the text.<sup>79</sup> Indeed, this must have been part of the attraction of illustrations in panoramic literature, which usually took the form of clear,

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<sup>78</sup> The fact that ‘au stade de l’illustration, l’œuvre est déjà entrée dans l’étape de la réception’ is pointed out by both Baguley (1992: 141) and Leduc-Adine (1992: 419).

<sup>79</sup> A number of theoretical texts refer to this distinction, using a variety of terms to do so. While Grivel contrasts ‘la réalisation visuelle mentale’ and ‘la réalisation illustrative’ (1992: 127), Hamon’s preferred terminology is that of ‘images à lire’ as opposed to ‘images à voir’ (2001: 265, 277 and 436-7). For Chartier, the distinction is one between the ‘visible’ and the ‘lisible’: ‘Le plus haut sens travaille dans l’écart entre le visible, ce qui est montré, figuré, représenté, mis en scène, et le lisible, ce qui peut être dit, énoncé, déclaré ; écart qui est à la fois le lieu d’une opposition et celui d’un échange entre l’un et l’autre registres [...]’ (2009: 204).



unambiguous portraits of various societal ‘types’, as if frozen in time for the reader’s perusal.<sup>80</sup> And yet Tofani’s illustrations seem more often to frustrate the clarity promised by the medium. The scenes selected, and the captions attributed to them, are frequently related to night, darkness and weather conditions which obscure vision:

Une bruine épaisse, humide, se joignait à la pluie; la nuit approchait. (TOFANI I: 121)

La lanterne qui nous éclairait jetait sur ce tableau une teinte plus lugubre encore. (TOFANI I: 201)

Il pêche en fraude la nuit. (TOFANI II: 705)

Similarly, both the act of blinding<sup>81</sup> and the subsequent blindness of the Maître d’école appear to have fascinated Tofani, inspiring a number of illustrations:

Rodolphe, le docteur, le Chourineur et l’assassin restent seuls. (TOFANI I: 153)

Allons-nous-en... conduis-moi... sortons d’ici. (TOFANI I: 361)

Cherchant Tortillard à tâtons... (TOFANI I: 369)

Et conduisit le maître d’école. (TOFANI I: 409)

The visual difficulties experienced by other characters, such as Tortillard, are also given an ironic translation into image, as in the illustration captioned ‘Le fils de Bras-Rouge ne distingua rien’ (TOFANI II: 1001). The reader can see the Maître d’école and la Chouette struggling in the shadowy foreground of the image but, unaided by the illustration and its caption, which adopt the unhelpful perspective of

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<sup>80</sup> On this phenomenon see Hamon 2001: 402 and (with particular reference to *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes* and *Paris ou le Livre des Cent-et-un* (1831-1834)), Gauthier 2011: 139-41. On the ‘lisibilité, précision, maîtrise des stéréotypes (notamment dans la représentation des personnages)’, see Couégnas (1992: 46, emphasis in original).

<sup>81</sup> This is a key scene, also depicted in the Administration de Librairie edition (1851a) and the Beaucé and Staal edition of the same year (1851b: 48).

Tortillard, must read on to discover the details of the incident. We are reminded of Letourneux's 'gesticulation à vide' (2007)<sup>82</sup> in that the very scenes and settings supposedly being made visible to us by the illustrations are characterized by an obscurity which threatens if not to defy then at least to problematize their depiction.

Instances of genuine revelation are rather more rare, one of the few examples being the illustration in which we see la Louve revealing her tattoo to Fleur-de-Marie, captioned '– Voyez-vous cela ? s'écria la Louve' (TOFANI II: 697). Elliptical sections of text also provide an opportunity not only for revelation but also for quite free interpretations of the text, as is the case of the illustration of the Maître d'école's dream. The section of text from which the caption is taken abstains from detailing the scoundrel's nightmarish visions:

Il sembla au Maître d'école que la vue lui était rendue.  
Il ouvrit les yeux... il vit...  
Mais ce qu'il vit le frappa d'une telle épouvante qu'il jeta un cri perçant et s'éveilla en sursaut de ce rêve horrible. (MP: 359)

This allows Tofani to assert his own 'voice', producing an illustration which appears to have little basis in Sue's text. This type of illustration, much like the footnotes discussed in III.2 above, thus creates an impression of polyphony which adds to the complexity of the text.<sup>83</sup>

As Grivel explains, showing and concealing are mutually dependent: '[s]'il n'y a plus rien à cacher, il n'y a non plus rien à peindre', 'le cache est nécessaire à la vue [...]' (Grivel 1992: 132 and 133, emphases in original). Nicol agrees that

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<sup>82</sup> See quotation p. 76.

<sup>83</sup> As Leduc-Adine explains, 'il y a très rarement identité entre écrivain et illustrateur' (1992: 418), but the effect of polyphony can be even more striking when multiple illustrators work on the same text (see Baguley 1992: 142; Cambray 2007: 291 and Witkowski 1992: 173). According to Thibault, this is a deliberate tactic, designed to safeguard 'une liberté d'interprétation, souvent compromise par la lecture d'un texte dans une édition illustrée' (1992: 149). On generic polyphony ('différents genres picturaux [...] tableaux dramatiques [...] portraits [...] natures mortes [...]'), see Leduc-Adine (1992: 418).

‘[l]’image [...] tire précisément sa puissance du commerce avec l’invisible’ (2005: 226), explaining that the etymological roots of the word ‘image’ are in *imago*, meaning mask, and pointing out that ‘invisibility’, or unobtrusiveness, is often prized in the visual presentation of texts: ‘dans la tradition de l’imprimerie, une bonne typographie est celle qui se fait oublier, qui se rend comme invisible’ (225). Tofani’s illustrations take this ‘commerce avec l’invisible’ a step further, exploiting recurrent diegetic references to darkness and blindness so as to act as a source of obfuscation rather than illumination, and thereby frustrating our expectations. The interplay between showing and concealing is extremely self-conscious, and reminds us of Hamon’s description of irony: ‘l’ironie consiste bien à cacher quelque chose pour le rendre plus visible’ (2001: 269). The illustrations used to accompany Aimard’s *Invisibles de Paris*,<sup>84</sup> seemingly at odds with the ‘invisibility’ suggested by the title, would, as such, make for another fascinating case study.

Many of the captions make tantalizing references to features which are inevitably conspicuous by their absence from the illustrations themselves. References to non-visual phenomena, such as speech or other sounds, are frequent:

Sarah causait en anglais avec son frère Tom. (TOFANI I: 289)

Sa clarinette rend des sons lamentables. (TOFANI I: 449)

A ce moment, on frappa bruyamment à la porte. (TOFANI I: 473)

A ce moment, on entendit le bruit d’une voiture dans la cour de l’hôtel.  
(TOFANI II: 657)

Tenez, maître, dit la créole, écoutez une chanson de mon pays.  
(TOFANI II: 1073)

On n’entendait que le grincement sonore des ciseaux. (TOFANI II: 1409)

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<sup>84</sup> Aimard’s novel, the second tome of which is entitled ‘Les compagnons de la lune’, is a ‘roman au nom significatif’ according to Letourneux (2007). On ‘[c]et imaginaire de la lumière et de l’obscurité’, the moon in particular, and irony, see Hamon (2001: 268-9). See also p. 185 below.

Captions referring to colours are also common:<sup>85</sup>

Un petit fiacre bleu, à stores baissés, s'arrête devant chez nous.  
(TOFANI I: 217)

L'homme au bonnet bleu n'était autre que le Chourineur. (TOFANI II: 1217)

The illustrations thus appear to be providing a critical, self-conscious commentary on the limitations of the medium as much as on the text. As Leduc-Adine muses, 'La représentation ne serait-elle pas un leurre, un vide qui tente de masquer l'absence de toute représentation possible, l'impossibilité totale à représenter ?' (1992: 425). The apparent preoccupation of the illustrations with their own inadequacy also provides a distraction from the diegesis which, if frustrating for the reader, was equally felicitous for the authors and editors whose continued success hinged on the preservation and cultivation of mysterious elements of the text.

Images with a decorative function<sup>86</sup> seem to operate in a similar way, delaying and distracting from revelation. Thus the illustration captioned 'Un rayon de soleil vint empourprer d'une teinte resplendissante les carreaux de la chambre de la jeune fille' (TOFANI II: 753) performs no obvious narrative function,<sup>87</sup> but perhaps provides the reader with a degree of respite from the action-packed narrative,<sup>88</sup> as well as creating a satisfying impression (of little substance, needless to say) of having been shown something of importance.

<sup>85</sup> Tofani's illustrations were in black and white and coloured illustrations were considered particularly immoral (Hamon 2001: 180).

<sup>86</sup> See Nicol 2005: 229 and Leduc-Adine 1992: 424.

<sup>87</sup> On 'des incidences tout à fait accessoires de l'intrigue [...] : scènes de la vie de tous les jours, de la rue, du café, du café-concert [...]'; see Baguley (1992: 143).

<sup>88</sup> Nicol (2005: 229) likens the reader to a weary traveller, an image which rings true in the context of our analogy between city and text.

Concealment in illustrations can also be a means of euphemizing controversial elements of the text.<sup>89</sup> This can be done in two ways: ‘d’abord par le choix des scènes<sup>90</sup> qui relèvent plutôt de l’harmonie que de la violence, ensuite dans le traitement des scènes qui affaiblit les traits, leur horreur, ou qui en masque certaines réalités’ (Leduc-Adine 1992: 424). An illustration of Fleur-de-Marie with la Louve during a period of convalescence (which also appears in the second volume of the Rouff edition, with the caption ‘Fleur-de-Marie, appuyée sur le bras de la Louve, essayait ses forces’ (TOFANI II: 1337)) used as the cover illustration to the first volume, is a good example of the first type of euphemization. The scene is a minor one and, given its pastoral setting, extremely untypical of the novel as a whole. The circumstances leading to this period of convalescence (an attempt by Jacques Ferrand’s accomplices to murder Fleur-de-Marie by drowning her) are deliberately elided in the idyllic illustration. This incongruity pre-empts any criticism of this new edition, but is also clearly designed to stimulate the interest of a potential reader, who might well have wondered if this civilized, innocuous image could really relate to the same novel Barbey d’Aurevilly had described as ‘un colosse de papier, trempé dans de l’encre empoisonnée’ (Atkinson 1929: 206).

The illustration of the Chourineur slaughtering a ewe, captioned ‘Tenant aux dents un long couteau qui brillait dans le clair obscur, il attirait la brebis entre ses genoux’ (TOFANI I: 177), in fact combines both methods of euphemization. The scene, though obviously not devoid of violence, provides a rather more palatable subject than a number of other episodes from the text in which the Chourineur

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<sup>89</sup> It is, as Baguley puts it, ‘comme si on voulait amortir et neutraliser le choc de l’écrit par le baume du visuel’ (1992: 145). See also Leduc-Adine’s discussion of strategies of ‘euphémisation’ and ‘édulcoration’ (1992: 424).

<sup>90</sup> On illustration as ‘une double opération de sélection et d’exclusion’, see Cambray (2007: 293).

evokes in gory detail the bloodthirsty past behind his sobriquet, such as the following description of his killing spree in the military:

On tombe sur moi ; alors la rage me prend, le sang me monte aux yeux, j'y vois rouge... j'avais mon couteau à la main, j'étais de cuisine, et allez donc ! je me mets à chouriner... à chouriner... comme à l'abattoir. J'*entaille* le sergent, je blesse deux soldats !... une vraie boucherie ! onze coups de couteau à eux trois, oui, onze !... du sang, du sang comme dans un charnier ! (MP: 64, emphasis in original)

The treatment of the ewe scene is also toned down in the illustration and, as the choice of caption indicates, is based on this initial, fittingly ekphrastic but deceptively pastoral, description:

Un vif rayon de lumière, tombant d'aplomb, éclairait à la Rembrandt la rude figure du Chourineur, ses cheveux blond pâle et ses favoris roux. Courbé en deux, tenant aux dents un long couteau qui brillait dans le clair-obscur, il attirait la brebis entre ses genoux. (MP: 181)

The graphic violence of the text which follows is excluded from Tofani's illustration:

Au moment où la brebis sentit la lame, elle poussa un petit bêlement doux, plaintif, tourna son regard mourant vers le Chourineur, et deux jets de sang frappèrent le tueur au visage.

Ce cri, ce regard, ce sang dont il dégouttait, causèrent une épouvantable impression à cet homme. Son couteau lui tomba des mains, sa figure devint livide, contractée, effrayante sous le sang qui la couvrait ; ses yeux s'arrondirent, ses cheveux se hérissèrent [...]. (MP: 181)

The illustration is thus used to withhold information from, and thereby titillate, the reader. I will now consider this eroticizing function of the illustrations in more detail.

### **Illustration as titillation**

Hamon discusses in some depth 'l'extraordinaire sexualisation' of images in the nineteenth century (2001: 439) and is not alone in finding the sexual metaphor a

particularly appropriate one for describing the interaction between reader and image.<sup>91</sup> Burette, in his aforementioned letter to Sue, referred to illustrated editions as ‘ce genre de publication, qui tend à multiplier le nombre des lecteurs par tous les moyens de *séduction* que le commerce a merveilleusement appliquées’ (my emphasis). Similarly, Cambray writes that ‘l’illustration sert à *aiguiser la curiosité* du lecteur, à *augmenter son désir* de lire les pages qui suivent’ (2007: 288, my emphases). The expression ‘aiguiser la curiosité’ reminds us of the distinctly phallic image of the Chourineur’s gleaming knife.

The illustration which best exemplifies this eroticization of the image (which, indeed, echoes that of the text) is perhaps that of the scene in which Cecily tempts the fiendishly lustful Jacques Ferrand, who watches through a peephole in the door (Figure 3).<sup>92</sup> The use of ekphrasis,<sup>93</sup> describing the scene in terms of visual art, is strikingly insistent, as the quotations in Appendix VIII.3.4 (with my emphases added) demonstrate. The evocation of this ‘tableau’ not only serves to highlight the calculating artifice of Cecily, who has engineered the entire scene, but can also be read as a commentary on the strategies and influence of the illustrated novel. The ‘petit guichet de cinq ou six pouces’ (MP: 932) could well be a nod to the dimensions of illustrations and the frequency with which Cecily allows Ferrand to glimpse through the hatch, only to frustrate him by her game of showing and concealing, is inevitably reminiscent of the tactics at work in illustrated serializations:

pendant des heures entières, il plongeait son regard enflammé dans la chambre de la créole endormie ; car elle avait eu l’infernale complaisance de permettre que sa porte fût percée d’un *guichet qu’elle ouvrait souvent...* souvent, car Cecily n’avait qu’un but, celui d’*irriter incessamment la passion*

<sup>91</sup> On the use of sexual metaphors to describe engagements with both city and text, see IV.3 below.

<sup>92</sup> This significant image also appears in the Administration de Librairie edition (1851a).

<sup>93</sup> See Hamon 2001: 289-90.

*de cet homme sans la satisfaire, de l'exaspérer ainsi presque jusqu'à la déraison, afin de pouvoir alors exécuter les ordres qu'elle avait reçus...*  
(MP: 941, my emphases)

Ferrand, the grudgingly passive observer, as if emasculated by Cecily's 'stylet parfaitement acéré, dont la vue fit réfléchir le notaire' (MP: 936), is clearly in the position of the reader of illustrated fiction who was, according to Pelletan, typically female. The Beaucé and Staal illustrated edition (Figure 4) confirms the affinity between Ferrand and the reader. We see Cecily framed by the surrounding text, directing her 'regard fixe et pénétrant' and 'magnétique' (MP: 946 and 948) out to us just as, in the diegesis, she looks out through the peephole onto the lustful *notaire*.

The captions which accompany Tofani's illustrations also play an important role in this dialectic of showing and concealing. Barthes explains that *ancrage*, or information clearly identifying the scene and guiding its interpretation, is the most common function of linguistic messages accompanying images:

Aussi se développent dans toute société des techniques diverses destinées à *fixer* la chaîne flottante des signifiés, de façon à combattre la teneur des signes incertains :<sup>94</sup> le message linguistique est l'une de ces techniques. Au niveau du message littéral, la parole répond, d'une façon plus ou moins directe, plus ou moins partielle, à la question: *qu'est-ce que c'est ?* Elle aide à identifier purement et simplement les éléments de la scène et la scène elle-même: il s'agit d'une description dénotée de l'image (description souvent partielle), ou, dans la terminologie de Hjelmslev, d'une *opération* (opposée à la connotation). La fonction dénomminative correspond bien à un *ancrage* de tous les sens possibles (dénotés) de l'objet, par le recours à une nomenclature. (Barthes 1964: 1421, emphases in original)

Although a few captions in the Rouff edition do perform this function (for example, the scene where la Louve saves Fleur-de-Marie from drowning, unambiguously captioned 'Douée d'une force et d'une adresse peu communes, la Louve souleva la

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<sup>94</sup> Nicol makes the same point, describing how the caption is used 'pour endiguer la dangereuse prolifération des connotations de l'image' (2005: 229). See also Leduc-Adine 1992: 415.



Goualeuse' (TOFANI II: 969)) it appears to be reserved for the scenes which are so well-known that there is no danger of giving away information. The vast majority of the illustrations focus on less famous scenes and are characterized by a mystifying ellipsis. The use of a sentence fragment omitting the subject pronoun is a favourite strategy, in captions such as 'Et conduisit le maître d'école' (TOFANI I: 409) and 'Et s'attablèrent' (TOFANI II: 665). We also see instances of deliberate and mischievous omission of important information from the captions. 'Et compta lentement' (TOFANI I: 377), for example, refers to the activity of Tortillard in the background of the image, but makes no reference to the Maître d'école, prostrate in the foreground. In other examples, the ellipsis is disguised, as the absent pronoun is almost eclipsed by evocative verbs, nouns and adjectives. The reader is given a satisfying impression of description and explanation, but will have to read on to discover the missing information:

..Et en tira un pistolet à deux coups, le fit voir au Maître d'école.  
(TOFANI I: 113)

Se promenaient, causaient, ou restaient silencieux et contemplatifs, assis au soleil. (TOFANI II: 1385)

But the most tantalizing ellipses usually culminate in bathos, as in the caption 'A ce moment Rodolphe dit au cocher...' (TOFANI I: 81). The caption gives the reader the impression he is going to be party to the exchange of secret information when he reaches the section of text from which the quotation is taken, but in fact the exchange could not be more anodyne:

À ce moment, Rodolphe dit au cocher, qui avait dépassé le village de Sarcelles :

– Prends le premier chemin à droite, tu traverseras Villiers-le-Bel, et puis à gauche, toujours tout droit. (MP: 102)

The ellipsis is made necessary by the fact that the illustrations are always proleptic (anticipating the narrative to follow) and as such must preserve and heighten, rather than compromising, suspense.<sup>95</sup> As such, they replicate *en abyme* the ellipses which are central to any work of fiction (Leduc-Adine 1992: 416), but to the structure of the *feuilleton* in particular (Iser 1978: 191-2).

In this section we have seen how Tofani's illustrations of Sue's text reject and subvert the functions expected of a medium often assumed to be synonymous with clarity, revelation and explanation. Rather than being 'un secours [...] pour les « esprits faibles »' (Nicol 2005: 229), a sort of visual crutch for women, children and the illiterate, who were considered unequal to the complexities of the text, illustrations emerge from this case study as a sophisticated device, and part of an interaction with a reader rather more astute than nineteenth-century 'iconophobes' may have cared to acknowledge.

In Grivel's words: '*l'illustration n'est jamais illustrative. [...] elle n'éclaire pas, n'explique pas, mais retentit, prolonge, accélère ou introduit des effets émotionnels supplémentaires ou « gratuits » [...]*' (1992: 137, emphasis in original). While this was by no means a phenomenon unique to the *mystères urbains*,<sup>96</sup> the capacity of illustrations to frustrate and impede the narrative is showcased particularly well in the illustrated edition I have looked at here. Tofani picks up on the thematic importance of darkness and blindness and uses it to problematize his illustrations, which are either characterized by a confusing polyphony or a self-consciousness with regard to the limitations and inadequacies of the medium, all of which serve to distract the reader from the diegesis. Strategies of euphemization and titillation offer the reader a pleasing alternation between appeasement and intrigue,

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<sup>95</sup> On visual analepsis and prolepsis, see Cambray 2007: 287 and Leduc-Adine 1992: 416.

<sup>96</sup> Indeed Barthes argues that all popular images cultivate quite deliberately this 'confusion de lecture' (1964: 1420).

while elliptical captions pique the reader's interest and oblige him to read on. The promise of illustration, to provide explanation, and thereby offset mystery, is, therefore, ultimately specious. Ironically, the only thing the illustrations succeed in revealing or clarifying is the pervasive opacity of the city's mysteries ('ce qu'on découvre, c'est qu'il y a de l'obscurité', as Letourneux (2007) puts it) and the powerlessness of the medium in the face of this.

To hazard a more general conclusion, there are clearly parallels to be drawn between the function of prefaces, footnotes and illustrations in the *mystères*. As Nicol puts it:

Il est [...] naturel de penser que les images [...] subordonnées au texte, [...] sont destinées, comme la glose ou le dispositif de guidage, à venir en aide au lecteur. [...] Seulement il se trouve que les images sont porteuses d'une signification autrement plus redoutable [...]. (2005: 224)

Indeed, all of these paratexts, while appearing to guide the reader and to facilitate his encounter with the text, in actual fact repeatedly parody conventions and subvert expectations, so much so that we are at times invited to question their marginality and acknowledge their role as an integral part of the fiction. Thus even though the reader might be well acquainted with Paris, and even the hidden Paris popularized by Sue and those who sought to emulate his success, these confusing paratextual signposts, characterized by a deceptiveness worthy of the diegesis itself, become a new source of mystery.



Figure 3



Oh ! viens... viens... viens... (P. 1083.)

Eugène Sue. 1885. *Les Mystères de Paris*. Paris: Jules Rouff et Cie (TOFANI II), p. 1081

Figure 4



Eugène Sue. 1851b. *Les mystères de Paris; édition illustrée par J.-A. Beaucé et Staal*. Paris: Paris, 5, rue du Pont-de-Lodi (Imprimerie Schneider), p. 248



#### IV. PALIMPSESTUOUS IDENTITIES

Links between literature and identity have a long history, both in terms of narratives in which characters struggle to trace their origins and obtain what they hope will be a salutary self-knowledge,<sup>1</sup> and in terms of attempts to ascertain the generic identity of texts and thereby facilitate our understanding of them. In the nineteenth century, a fascination, both real and literary, with the rapidly growing and changing city made this preoccupation with identity all the more keenly felt. In Paris especially, discerning the identity of the city and the various identities within it constituted ‘a veritable nineteenth-century obsession’ (Prendergast 1992: 2). Prendergast counters the assumption of a coherent Parisian identity which characterized republican and imperial images of modern Paris<sup>2</sup> with an alternative argument: namely, that the modern city surpasses and defies identification and intelligibility. Attempts to facilitate understanding of Paris, and in so doing stabilize the identity of both the city and its observers, via projects such as Haussmann’s modernization of the city under the Second Empire, tended to backfire. Rather than bestowing a coherent, readable and predictable identity on Paris, it has been argued that Haussmann in fact created a city characterized by surprise and illegibility, ‘in which ‘identity’, psychic and social, would come to be perceived as uncertain and problematical’ (Prendergast 1992: 10).<sup>3</sup> As the nineteenth century progressed, circulation and speed, in the form of new modes of transport, posed a further threat to stable identity. Railway travel, and later the automobile, produced ‘a new form of consciousness’, which saw

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<sup>1</sup> Sophocles’s *Oedipus Rex* is a particularly good example, and one which has remained central to western culture since it was written (c. 430 B.C.).

<sup>2</sup> Prendergast’s reference is to Hugo, who ‘will denounce the miseries of nineteenth-century urban living, but will rarely lose the sense of Paris as a culturally integrated and historically purposive creation’ (1992: 7).

<sup>3</sup> On Haussmann’s endeavours, see also II.2 above.

perception ‘speeded up, fluid, blurred, disorientated’ (Prendergast 1992: 193) and identity similarly fragmented.<sup>4</sup>

The understandable nervousness surrounding questions of identity meant that nineteenth-century writers returned time and again to such issues. For authors of popular fiction, identity proved a particularly rich vein which, by virtue of its very vagueness and instability, lent itself to multiple appropriations and transformations. Thus, to take *Les Mystères de Paris* as an example, we see characters such as Rodolphe catapulted effortlessly between opposing social spheres, and privileged infants such as Fleur-de-Marie separated from their parents and plunged into lives of poverty and ill-treatment. Names and costumes are changed, borrowed, bought or stolen, by a succession of chameleon-like characters, with an array of motivations, ranging from the innocent and honourable incognito of Rodolphe, to the rather more calculated role-play of characters such as the Maître d’école.

From a research perspective, as Prendergast points out, the resonance of the notion of identity extends beyond the narratives themselves. Just like the intra-diegetic characters, readers are called upon to solve ‘mysteries of identity’ by recognizing certain types of character and thereby drawing conclusions as to the identity of the text itself, or its generic status. Questions of genre are especially interesting with regard to paraliterature, which is often described as a particularly heterogeneous category.<sup>5</sup> The democratization of literature initiated at this time also made the identity of readers a new focus of interest. With all this in mind, this chapter will examine several aspects of identity in the *mystères urbains*. In section IV.1, I will examine how the emergence of the detective figure is *mise en abyme* in

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<sup>4</sup> Williams (1993) discusses the links between perceptual experience and identity on a number of occasions (e.g. 163-4 (in Dickens) and 296). His analysis of Woolf and Joyce (241-7) is especially relevant, not least for its remarks on the particular pertinence of fragmented perception and identity to modern (popular) media such as film.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Boyer 1992.



Boisgobey's *Mystères du nouveau Paris* (1876), via a particularly original and versatile use of the hunting metaphor. In section IV.2 I will look at the importance of collective identities in the *mystères*, analysing the function of secret societies in the texts. My examples will be taken from Aimard's *Invisibles de Paris* (1867) and Lermina's *Loups de Paris* (1876). A final section (IV.3), will consider representations of femininity in the *mystères*, with particular reference to Zaccone's *Pieuvres de Paris* (1878) and Balzac's *Mystères de province* (1843).



#### IV.1 – *SUR LA PISTE DU POLICIER:* THE DETECTIVE *AU SECOND DEGRÉ*

If, as we have already seen, the palimpsest provides an especially apt model to describe both the nineteenth-century city, and the hypertextual transformations of Sue's text, then it is also a particularly fertile metaphor in the context of crime fiction. In her 2007 study *The Palimpsest*, Dillon refers to 'the persistent fascination with palimpsests in the popular imagination, embodying as they do the mystery of the secret, the miracle of resurrection and the thrill of detective discovery' (12-3). For Dillon, detective reading and palimpsest reading are strikingly similar, in that detective fiction contains two texts, as identified by Todorov in his 'Typologie du roman policier' (1971): the *fable* (story), which criminal characters frequently attempt to erase or obscure, and the *sujet* (plot), or superimposed version of events.<sup>6</sup>

I will attempt here to make a link between the *mystères urbains* and the later *roman policier*, by contending that the palimpsest trope can be used to explain not only the structure of the *roman policier* in its established form, but also the genesis of the genre. I will argue that the use of the hunting metaphor in the *mystères*, in some instances deliberately familiar while in others markedly less so, echoes the ambiguity inherent to the palimpsest, and thus prefigures the palimpsestuous premise of the *roman policier*. The examples used to formulate and illustrate my arguments are taken from a novel by Fortuné du Boisgobey (1821-1891), a prolific French popular novelist and disciple of Émile Gaboriau. In Boisgobey's *Mystères du nouveau Paris* (1876) (NOUV), Marcel Robinier, posing as John Caradoc de

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<sup>6</sup> The palimpsest also has tremendous extra-diegetic resonance, in that crime fiction frequently involves the rewriting of historical events and scandals. See David Platten's discussion of Didier Daeninckx's *Meurtres pour mémoire*, in which he describes the palimpsest as one of several metaphors 'liable to congregate in the interzone between fiction and history' (2011: 127-8).

Colorado, born in Paris, returns to the crime-ridden capital, having spent many years working in California, in order to avenge his father's murder. Boisgobey's novel provides a particularly rich case study for my exploration of the hunting metaphor as deployed in the *mystères*.

Evocations of hunting were a recurrent feature of nineteenth-century French literature. Vareille notes the presence in the *roman policier* in particular of 'la constellation de clichés'<sup>7</sup> qui tourne autour de la chasse, transformant le criminel en « gibier » et le détective en « limier », à qui son « flair » permet de remonter une « piste » ou de tendre des « pièges »' (1989: 107). According to both Prendergast (1992) and Gill (2009), the use of this cliché in popular fiction is part of a broader discourse of savagery, in which comparison to animals and primitives is a means of emphasizing the difference of, and thereby separating and controlling, criminals and the urban poor from the bourgeois reader, thus providing a reassuring sense of mastery. For Prendergast, the motifs and terms associated with the cliché amount to 'stratagems of separation, enclosure and surveillance' (1992: 87): 'The barbarian at the gate, or the reptile in primeval mud, these are the tropes with which the discourse closed off the lower depths, in a naturalizing and regressive reduction to the animal and the primitive' (86-7). Gill agrees that the analogy, at least in its initial incarnations under the July Monarchy, was a means of defusing and demystifying danger, reflecting 'a need to infantilize city-dwellers, transforming Paris into a fairy-tale world of talking animals. Though staring at humans was a cultural taboo regulated by the codes of propriety, staring at animals was not' (2009: 133-4). Thus

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<sup>7</sup> Vareille uses the term 'cliché', but is emphatic in his rejection of its pejorative connotations (see also 3-4). The reader should note that my own references to cliché, like those of Vareille, are not intended to imply any sort of value judgement. For a seminal discussion of cliché, see Amossy and Rosen 1982.

in Sue's *Mystères de Paris*, readers could follow the adventures of characters such as la Louve and la Chouette from a safe distance and with a clear conscience.<sup>8</sup>

But any such impressions of mastery had to be carefully controlled so as not to destroy the (lucrative) premise of mystery altogether. Letourneux (2007) actually sees the use of the hunting metaphor as a means of exoticizing an otherwise familiar terrain. Although authors writing about contemporary Paris did not have recourse to geographical or temporal exoticism, the metaphor is a clear reference to the adventure novels of writers such as Fenimore Cooper, whose *Last of the Mohicans* was published in 1826, Mayne Reid, who published a number of adventure novels between 1850 and 1865, Gabriel Ferry, author of *Costal l'Indien* (1852) and, more famously, *Le Coureur des bois* (1853), and Gustave Aimard, who wrote *Les Trappeurs de l'Arkansas* (1858) (Vareille 1989: 107). The exoticism created by borrowing the hunting cliché from the adventure novel creates what Letourneux (2007) calls 'la distance par la fiction', or what we might term the 'intertextual exotic'. As Vareille points out, the hunting metaphor has no basis in the real-life jargon of detective work, but is strictly literary in origin. Thus although the reader may be intimately acquainted with nineteenth-century Paris, and unfazed by unsavoury characters, who have been demystified via a simplistic animal typology, he finds himself confronted with a self-consciously fictional world and a series of intertextual references which he must recognize and navigate.

In actual fact, whether the metaphor is being used to dispel or perpetuate mystery (as with a number of other mechanisms in the mysteries, drawing on an erotic dialectic of showing and concealing explored by Barthes (1973a), it almost

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<sup>8</sup> Of la Louve, we are told: 'quelque chose de violent, de farouche, de bestial, dans l'expression de la physionomie de cette femme [...] expliquait son surnom' (MP: 618), while the older woman is described as: 'une vieille borgnesse qu'on appelait la Chouette... parce qu'elle avait un nez crochu, un œil vert tout rond, et qu'elle ressemblait à une chouette qui aurait un œil crevé' (MP: 47).

certainly does both) is rather less important than the way in which the metaphor is reanimated in these texts, with inevitable implications for the identity of both the characters and the texts themselves. As Vareille points out, cliché is only pejorative ‘à l’intérieur d’un code esthétique de l’originalité qui vit la beauté comme écart, non-conformité à un canon’ (1989: 106). Cliché, by definition, can only exist across a group of texts and as such, in popular literature, becomes a sort of *indicateur générique* (Vareille 1989: 110), where genre is a synonym for and guarantee of readability, a promise that a given text will conform to a reader’s expectations. Vareille also explains that cliché, rather than being used in a redundant, throwaway fashion, as part of a process of innocent, anodyne repetition, can be reactivated to become a productive, creative force: ‘pour employer la terminologie de Riffaterre,<sup>9</sup> le cliché initial figé, soumis à une série de variations et de développements, va jouer le rôle de « générateur », de « matrice » et de « noyau » et par voie de conséquence devenir productif’ (1989: 112).<sup>10</sup>

### **Familiar use of the hunting cliché**

The familiarity of the hunting cliché is used particularly effectively to prepare the reader for what will become, in the *roman policier*, an intellectual search. The urban setting is crucial, in that it provides a kind of hermeneutic training ground, a space in which that search can be concretized and rehearsed by the détective-limier, whose mission is given the reassuringly familiar trappings of a physical hunt.<sup>11</sup> As Vareille puts it:

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<sup>9</sup> Vareille refers to Riffaterre 1979 and 1983.

<sup>10</sup> Marcandier-Colard, with reference Crouzet 1995, makes very similar remarks about the *fécondité* of cliché (1998: 254-5).

<sup>11</sup> On hunting as a metaphor for hermeneutics, see Ginzburg 1990: 102-4.

Conformément à l'étymologie, l'*enquête* est d'emblée *quête*, poursuite. Il n'y a pas d'*abord* un raisonnement ou une déduction, *puis* une poursuite. Non : enquête et poursuite sont confondues, ce qui montre bien la dette de ces auteurs envers les romanciers de la prairie (ou le roman d'aventures de façon générale) [...] Il ne s'agit pas seulement de raisonner ou de faire des fiches [...] ; il faut *agir, bouger, courir, poursuivre*. Ou, plutôt, raisonner est déjà agir, se déplacer, comme dans ces temps primitifs où l'intelligence ne se séparait pas d'un parcours. (1989: 128-9, emphases in original)

Vareille notes this exteriorization of reflection in Gaboriau (a contemporary and mentor of Boisgobey) and in Doyle, Leroux and Leblanc (writing in the first two decades of the twentieth century), but clearly the same thing is happening here in the work of this less well-known writer, and at an earlier date. In *Les Mystères de Paris*, physical and intellectual pursuits are diametrically opposed.<sup>12</sup> But in Boisgobey's text, a link is made between the two. Marcel and Dominique's initial mistrust of official French police, typified by the excessively formal and pedantic Chambras ('— Un agent... autant vaut dire un espion, murmura le chasseur d'ours [Dominique] avec une grimace de dégoût' (NOUV: 82)) soon gives way to a fascination with Chambras's techniques and an appreciation of common ground (indeed, in its literal sense). Chambras announces: 'd'ici très-peu de jours, je vais me mettre en chasse [...] [p]artout où se tient le gibier que je vais poursuivre, partout où vont les coquins, dans les cabarets, dans les bals, dans les garnis, aux carrières d'Amérique' (NOUV: 261), and appeals to Marcel's taste for adventure in order to secure his help: 'je vous promets que vous verrez des choses curieuses. Peut-être bien y aura-t-il quelques risques à courir' (NOUV: 261). Marcel becomes Chambras's unofficial apprentice and, much like the reader, is initiated into the activity of detection via this literalization of the hunting cliché. As Vareille explains, the *roman policier* of the early twentieth century would abandon this spatial dimension in favour of pure

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<sup>12</sup> See quotation p. 57 above (MP: 246).

reasoning and logic.<sup>13</sup> But it is clearly in the *mystères urbains* that the physical enactment of intellectual activity prepares the ground for this leap into abstraction.

Given that there is a historical link between hunting and early manifestations of human intelligence, the metaphor seems especially apt:

Les civilisations préhistoriques étant ou fondées sur la chasse, ou pastorales et nomades, et l'odorat (le « flair ») y jouant un rôle infiniment plus grand que dans nos cultures actuelles, il semble que l'image du déplacement spatial soit lié dès l'origine aux premières manifestations de l'intelligence humaine. (Vareille 1989: 129)

In much the same way that hunting characterized the origins of human intelligence, so the hunting metaphor, used very specifically in the *mystères urbains*, points to the origins of the *roman policier*.

There are other familiar deployments of the cliché, such as the repeated references to the main characters' North American origins or experiences. In Boisgobey's novel, we are informed from the outset of the restlessness of Marcel's Canadian companion Dominique, repeatedly referred to as 'un sauvage', ill at ease in Parisian society. He spends his time shooting in the garden of his hôtel and sleeps with three revolvers under his pillow. Believing the city to be the very antithesis of the lifestyle he has left behind in Canada, Dominique is impatient to hear why his friend has come to Paris, so that they can leave as soon as possible:

Tu m'as promis de m'expliquer ce que nous sommes venus faire à Paris. Je tiens à le savoir le plus tôt possible, parce que, vois-tu, s'il s'agissait de rester pour mon plaisir dans cette grande ville où on ne voit que des pavés et des maisons...

– Tu retournerais vite au Canada, n'est-ce pas, Dominique ?

– Ma foi ! oui. Que veux-tu ! c'est plus fort que moi. J'ai la nostalgie des grands bois, et il me prend parfois des envies folles de chasser le bison ou bien l'ours gris. (NOUV: 17-8)

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<sup>13</sup> Modern-day criminal reconstructions, which resort to the same kind of hermeneutic 'spoon-feeding', by restoring unsolved crimes to their original, physical terms, could thus be seen as a kind of nostalgic regression to primitive, material modes of reasoning.



The irony of Dominique's unease and the marked proximity between the bison- and bear-hunting he remembers so wistfully and the hunting to be done in the urban jungle will soon become clear. Dominique's promise of help ('tu peux compter sur moi. Les ours gris attendront' (18)) is similarly ironic. Rather than postponing his hunting activity, he will simply be transposing it to a new terrain: *le nouveau Paris* instead of *le nouveau monde*. Explicit comparisons are made between the two settings: 'Par une nuit obscure, à deux heures du matin, ce coin perdu de la grande ville était aussi désert qu'une gorge des Montagnes Rocheuses' (170). The similarity is underlined by the fact that the vagueness of Marcel's recollections of Parisian topography does not hinder him in the slightest: 'Le Californien, qui n'avait pas mis les pieds dans ce quartier depuis plus de vingt ans, ne savait pas du tout où il était et ne s'en inquiétait guère' (163).<sup>14</sup>

Animal and hunting imagery is also used from the earliest stages of the novel to evoke characters and clashes between them. When Marcel intervenes to save Cécile from the unwanted attentions of l'*Épouardeur*, we are told that the latter 'avait l'air d'un ours s'appêtant à étouffer le chasseur qui l'a blessé' (36). After watching a publication execution, Marcel remarks that the criminal 's'est laissé tuer avec la résignation d'un tigre pris au piège' (95). When Dominique is attacked, Marcel is able to use his hunting prowess in an urban context for the first time: 'M. de Colorado se baissa pour ne pas être vu et attendit, dans la position d'un chasseur à l'affût' (171). The criminal retreats, obligingly, like a wounded animal: 'le drôle se releva prestement et s'enfuit comme un lièvre cinglé par le plomb d'un chasseur' (172).

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<sup>14</sup> Note that, while the American origins or connections of Boisgobey's characters undoubtedly feed into the hunting metaphor central to his novel, they also point to a more general *fin-de-siècle* trend towards 'américanisation', which affected both city and text. See V.1 below.

Comparing criminals to animals was a characteristic feature of the *roman frénétique*, the French branch of gothic fiction preoccupied with horror, at its peak in the 1820s and 1830s. Vareille explains how such comparisons were a means of classifying and thereby demystifying a variety of criminal natures: ‘Par son inadaptation à la vie sociale, le criminel est *ours*. [...] Par sa cruauté et son instinct sanguinaire, il est *tigre*’ (1989: 124). Sue, in his description of the Fosse-aux-Lions prison, proposes a similar taxonomy: ‘Sur les traits rusés de celui-là, on retrouvait la perfide subtilité du renard ; chez celui-ci, la rapacité sanguinaire de l’oiseau de proie ; chez cet autre, la férocité du tigre ; ailleurs enfin, l’animale stupidité de la brute’ (MP: 1011).

### **Reappropriating the cliché**

But while these are some of the more predictable ways in which Boisgobey draws on the hunting cliché, which we might liken to the palimpsestuous process of preservation, he also appears to question the legitimacy of the metaphor and push its boundaries on a number of occasions. Following Dominique’s dramatic fall when he jumps through a window in pursuit of a thief, the priorities of Marcel and Chambras, the official police agent he shadows, are clearly different. While Marcel can think only of rushing to the railway station to see if Dominique has survived the fall, Chambras wants to concentrate on trapping a second criminal who is still in the house and unaware of their presence (Appendix VIII.4.1).

The next day, Marcel’s hunting skills are present, but are the source of frustration rather than satisfaction. We are told:

Il put constater dans sa chambre les traces de la tentative de *Pain-de-Blanc* et reconnaître que toutes les suppositions de l’agent de police s’étaient vérifiées.

Mais ce fut là une bien triste satisfaction, car la sagacité de M. Chambras ne lui rendait pas son vieux camarade qu'il aimait comme un frère. (340-1)

He uses his observation skills to allay his fears, rather than to provide answers to the mystery, and formulates a series of questions:

Pour tromper son inquiétude, il voulut examiner minutieusement le théâtre de l'accident, et il vit avec une certaine satisfaction que la muraille était moins élevée qu'il ne l'avait cru en la regardant de bas en haut. Cependant, il lui sembla presque possible que Dominique eût exécuté ce terrible saut sans se briser les membres. Mais que le voleur eût eu la même chance, cela passait l'imagination. Et, d'ailleurs, qu'étaient-ils devenus tous les deux ? Le problème restait à résoudre. (341)

Unwilling to pursue the questions himself, he chooses to wait passively for Chambras's verdict.

Elsewhere, Boisgobey seems to turn the cliché on its head altogether, just like the palimpsest which, in superimposing something entirely new, obscures the underlying hypotext. The episode in which Marcel saves Clothilde Pouliguen, a friend's wife, from a disastrous adulterous liaison with the caddish Belamer, shows him covering tracks rather than following them. Familiar imagery is used, but its application reversed, as we see Marcel saving innocents from traps rather than laying traps to snare wrongdoers. He tells Clothilde: 'je viens vous sauver [...] du piège où vous allies [*sic*] tomber, du piège tendu par un misérable qui ne mérite pas que vous vous perdiez pour lui' (150). He finds her waiting in her carriage for Belamer, who unbeknownst to Clothilde, has announced to his *cercle* friends that he has no intention of seeing through their planned elopement. Marcel informs Madame Pouliguen that Belamer is not to be trusted and sets about helping her to remove any incriminating evidence, such as the letter she has left for her mother, explaining the elopement and asking for her forgiveness: 'Il faut qu'il ne reste aucune trace d'une

folie qui aurait pu vous coûter cher. Ne perdons pas un instant' (162). When Madame Pouliguen is reluctant to let Marcel see her home, he promises he can be just as adept at ignoring clues as he is at noting them:

[Vous craindriez] [q]ue je ne remarque la porte et que je ne retienne le numéro ? Rassurez-vous, madame, je n'en ai nulle envie et je fermerai les yeux, s'il le faut, pour ne rien voir, car je ne veux pas me souvenir de ce qui s'est passé cette nuit. (164)

The cliché is thus brought back to life and recalled to our attention by its self-conscious, parodic application. For the reader, the familiar cliché should offer a key to the text, but instead Boisgobey seems to, in Vareille's words '[faire] ressortir l'étrangeté sous la familiarité apparente' (1989: 117, emphases in original). The way in which Marcel struggles to reconcile hunting reflexes and rather more emotional reactions shows how the cliché is used as part of the diegesis to hone and refine the detective character. The prototype of the detective figure emerging across a variety of texts at this time is here internalized and dramatized within one character.

The application of the metaphor is also extremely flexible. For example, when the drunken *Époullardeur* accosts Cécile as he falls out of a café, we are told: 'Elle s'affaissa comme une perdrix saisie par un vautour' (NOUV: 34). Similarly, during the episode where Dominique is attacked:

Tout à coup, après avoir fait un long détour en se traînant par terre comme un tigre qui rampe sur le ventre pour arriver à portée de saisir sa proie, l'autre se dressa derrière le promeneur occupé à causer avec son complice. (172)

This recalls a very similar description in *Les Mystères de Paris*, when la Chouette prepares to murder Sarah Mac-Gregor, and we are told: 'Avec l'astuce du chat-tigre, qui rampe et s'avance traîtreusement vers sa proie, la vieille profita de la préoccupation de la comtesse pour faire insensiblement le tour du bureau qui la

séparait de sa victime' (MP: 873). The versatility of the cliché is evident here, and the way in which terms such as 'proie' are used to describe victims being sized up, as well as criminals being trailed, is both striking and significant. The ambiguity of the hunting metaphor is perhaps best summed up by a conversation between Fleur-de-Marie and la Louve in *Les Mystères de Paris*. La Louve dreams of leaving prison and living in the forest with Martial, where they will make a living from poaching, but wonders whether this will constitute a salutary pastoral idyll or a return to criminality:

– Excepté le braconnage, il n'a commis, n'est-ce pas, aucune autre action coupable ?

– Non, il est braconnier sur la rivière comme il était dans les bois, et il a raison. Tiens, est-ce que les poissons ne sont pas comme le gibier, à qui peut les prendre ? Où donc est la marque de leur propriétaire ? (MP: 637)

Fleur-de-Marie suggests he work as a *garde-chasse*. Thus, wherever we are to place them on the criminal spectrum (reformed and industrious workers, or unscrupulous repeat offenders), Martial and la Louve will be described using the same semantic field. Gill terms this 'semantic reversibility' (2009: 208) and notes Smith-Rosenberg's argument that 'during moments of intense confrontation, politically opposing groups adopt identical metaphors and images' (1986: 246).

A number of related but slightly different applications of the hunting metaphor at this time are also notable. Sue draws parallels between hunting and amorous pursuit, for example when Rodolphe sympathizes with Madame d'Harville over her arranged marriage: 'Rien ne m'a toujours paru plus barbare et plus sauvage que cette coutume d'emporter brutalement une jeune femme comme une proie' (MP:

408). Gill also notes the metaphor in evocations of prostitution<sup>15</sup> and of the hostile, predatory social gaze.<sup>16</sup>

Readers of the *mystères urbains*, then, would have to sift through all these connotations and associations to make sense of Boisgobey's text. Ironically, it is because of its very familiarity that the cliché becomes difficult to read. Its frequent and varied applications result in a problematic polysemy. This is undoubtedly part of a commercially astute but otherwise gratuitous (albeit amusing), game of showing and concealing. The cliché appears to be offering the reader a familiar key with which to interpret the text, but due to its polysemy is in fact rather less transparent than it seems, and raises as many questions as it answers. The fluidity of the metaphor means that identity can at no point be taken for granted. The reader, who realizes that identical imagery is being applied to opposing groups, is called into action and compelled to make judgements as to the identity of characters and, by extension, the identity of the text.

To conclude, in *Les Mystères du nouveau Paris*, Boisgobey's use of the hunting metaphor is, by turns, both predictable and surprising. At times, the novel is clearly grafted onto a pre-existing corpus of adventure novels, and the familiarity of the hunting cliché emphasized. This familiarity is used to 'train' the reader and to spell out in explicit, physical terms the hermeneutic skills which will later need to be intellectualized, when they are called upon in abstract, rather than concrete, scenarios. But we also see this familiarity offset against a series of unexpected applications. Boisgobey wilfully subverts and thereby rewrites the metaphor, for example by giving it a problematic polysemy which undermines its traditional

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<sup>15</sup> Gill refers in particular to Vallès (2009: 150) and also notes another example of semantic reversibility: 'The pursuit of women for hire was often metaphorically associated with hunting, but it was also claimed that men were in fact the prey [...]' (2009: 111).

<sup>16</sup> Gill's reference is to Gustave Louïs's *Physiologie de l'Opinion* (1855) (2009: 53).

association with reassuring notions of legibility, control and mastery. This playful alternation is given a fictional echo. The emergence of the detective figure is crystallized, *mise en abyme*, in the character of Marcel, whose oscillation between the role of hunter, using tracks and traces as an aid to detection, and hunt saboteur, deliberately obscuring those tracks, echoes the ambiguity inherent to the palimpsest. The ambiguous impulses of showing and concealing, of reiterating the already written and, conversely, overwriting it, were thus clearly intrinsic to the *policier* genre from its inception, at the level of individual metaphors as well as larger structural devices. Boisgobey's text thus has a central role in the hypertextual chain, as both a hypertext, transforming the hunting imagery used by Cooper, Reid, Ferry and Aimard, and at the same time a hypotext, to be transformed in turn by the *roman policier*, whose palimpsestuous premise it anticipates.

Having considered the role of the palimpsest in forging individual identities in the *mystères*, I will now turn my attention to the question of collective identities.





#### IV.2 – MYSTERY BY NUMBERS: THE ROLE OF SECRET SOCIETIES

Secret societies were a recurrent motif in nineteenth-century French literature, from Stendhal's *Vanina Vanini* (1829), recounting the love story between a young Italian aristocrat and a revolutionary *carbonaro*, to Balzac's *Histoire des Treize* (1833-9) and Féval's *Habits noirs* (from 1863). This fictional preoccupation reflected a very real phenomenon and the source of considerable political anxiety in nineteenth-century Paris. As Georg Simmel explains, the secret society has been seen as a threat to the State throughout political history. While governments support centralization in general, they want to be the ones coordinating the process of fusing individuals into units, and so any group seeking to do this for itself, by whatever means and for whatever reasons, is deemed an enemy (Simmel 1950: 375). France saw what Gill describes as a 'bewildering succession of political regimes' (2009: 33) between 1789 and 1871, the inevitable response to which was an analogous glut of anti-establishment factions. Because, as Simmel puts it 'every group that is politically rejected, is called a secret society' (1950: 376), and the secret, precisely because it is an unknown quantity, is a more frightening prospect than any specific and identifiable political force, the French authorities saw sedition and conspiracy on every corner and adapted legislation accordingly. Following the French Revolution, the *loi martiale* of October 1789 defined and legislated against illegal meetings, acknowledging their criminal potential. There were a series of nineteenth-century amendments to this law, for example under the July Monarchy, and after the revolution of February 1848 *l'interdiction de rassemblement* was made particularly

stringent.<sup>17</sup> Nocturnal gatherings were considered especially pernicious and punished accordingly.

This fear of the group can be seen in the following example from Aimard's *Invisibles de Paris*, where a crowd scene is described thus:

Jacques Bonhomme [...] se plonge bravement au sein de la foule qui grouille, du peuple qui s'étouffe.

On le pousse, on le presse, on marche sur ses enfants, on renverse sa digne moitié, on lui vole sa montre, il crie ; arrivent des gardes qui le mènent au poste, parce qu'il vient de causer un rassemblement de vingt mille personnes au milieu d'une masse ambulante de huit cent mille âmes.  
(INV: 370)

While this anecdotal excerpt from Aimard's novel certainly sums up the general mood in the capital in the second half of the century, it is to the portrayal of more organized group activities in the *mystères* that I now wish to turn my attention. Secret societies abound in these novels and it is my contention that their constant presence is indicative of rather more than a cheap narrative trick (which would be the accusation commonly levelled against the introduction of secret societies in later detective fiction).<sup>18</sup> In attempting to identify and illustrate the rather more significant

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<sup>17</sup> '1851: "A decree of December 8 authorized the deportation, without hearing,... of any person presently or formerly belonging to a secret society. This was understood as referring to any society at all, whether a society for mutual aid or a literary society, that met – even in broad daylight – without the express permission of the prefect of police." A. Malet and P. Grillet, *XIX<sup>e</sup> Siècle* (Paris, 1919), p. 264' (Benjamin 1999: 608).

<sup>18</sup> Twentieth-century critics were unanimous in their derision of the role played by secret societies in detective fiction. G.K. Chesterton, in his 1926 preface to *The Wrong Letter*, praised author Walter S. Masterman for avoiding a number of antiquated devices deemed unworthy of the genre, one of which was the convenient introduction of secret societies into otherwise well-crafted narratives: 'The things [Masterman] does not do are the things being done everywhere to-day to the destruction of true detective fiction and the loss of this legitimate and delightful form of art. He does not introduce into the story a vast but invisible secret society with branches in every part of the world, with ruffians who can be brought in to do anything or underground cellars that can be used to hide anybody.' (Huntington Wright 1976 [1927]: 68). In his well-known article entitled 'Twenty Rules for Writing Detective Stories' (published in the *American Magazine*, September 1928), Huntington Wright (writing as S.S. Van Dine) seconded Chesterton's view in no uncertain terms, stating: 'Secret societies, camorras, mafias, *et al.*, have no place in a detective story. A fascinating and truly beautiful murder is irremediably spoiled by any such wholesale culpability. To be sure, the murderer in a detective novel should be given a sporting chance; but it is going too far to grant him a secret society to fall back on. No high-class, self-respecting murderer would want such odds' (1976 [1928]: 191).

and complex function performed by secret societies in these earlier novels, I will address three main ideas. First, I will consider the way in which these fictional secret societies challenge and transform our understanding of *l'envers* (the underside or underworld) and the implications this has for our approach to and understanding of the palimpsest, and of the *mystères* in general. I will then look at the way in which a sense of cohesive group identity and belonging in the secret societies, created by codification of costume and language, is alternately asserted and confused. The secret society emerges as a self-referential construct, whose system of initiates and outsiders reflects a very similar system built around the text itself. Finally, I will consider the way in which collective identities tend to break down in the texts, and seem ultimately to favour the emergence of individual detectives and criminals. Again, these diegetic tendencies are symptomatic of wider socio-historical and literary trends. In exploring these points, I will refer in particular to *Les Invisibles de Paris* (1867) by Gustave Aimard, a prolific writer of adventure novels, and *Les Loups de Paris* (1876) by Jules Lermina, a journalist and popular novelist, who also wrote under the pseudonym William Cobb.

### **Rewriting *l'envers***

As Mombert remarks, the motif of *l'envers* is recurrent in the *roman-feuilleton*, *roman policier* and *roman noir* (2006a: 21). Polarization is both physical and metaphorical. The physical darkness of catacombs, sewers and secret passages are used to frame and thus reinforce the nature of morally shady and deviant characters and activities.<sup>19</sup> Secret societies in the *mystères urbains* clearly feed into this

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<sup>19</sup> Lavergne notes several examples of this polarization, in Lermina's *Chasseurs de femmes* (1881) (2009: 186), as well as in Boisgobey and Leblanc (187).

polarization. Letourneux (2007) gives the example of the catacombs haunted by M. de Belen of the *Loups de Paris*.

This kind of literal treatment of a metaphor which will be handled in rather more abstract terms in the later *roman policier*, seems to be a way of preparing the reader for the subtleties and abstractions of detective fiction to come. Vareille (1989) remarks a similar concretization of the hunting metaphor in early French detective fiction (discussed in the previous section of this chapter), and just as the physical hunt will lose its material trappings to become an intellectual quest, the notion of the criminal underworld will become more than a mere geographical space. But if crime would no longer be signposted quite so explicitly, this was something for which readers had to be prepared. The concretization of the metaphor therefore allows the reader to flex his hermeneutic muscles, for want of a better term. Underground worlds and societies provide initial experiences of mystery, which prepare and prime the reader for the discovery of more complex mysteries, in which opposing moral forces are rather less clear-cut.<sup>20</sup>

Having thus spelt out the underworld metaphor and the polarization of above and below, good and bad, darkness and light, in these very literal terms, the *mystères urbains* then proceed to deconstruct and reinvent what Lavergne (2009) describes as a well-worn gothic trope. Secret societies are undeniably at home in these

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<sup>20</sup> Examples of blurred antitheses abound, in both popular and 'literary' fiction: Lavergne evokes Gaboriau's *Le Petit Vieux des Batignolles*, in which Godeuil observes the comings and goings of his mysterious neighbour, Méchinnet, who turns out to be a detective: 'Dans ce récit, Émile Gaboriau ménage habilement son effet de surprise. Le mystère du récit, avant celui de l'enquête, est d'abord celui du policier, qui présente toutes les apparences de l'individu louche et malhonnête, reflet des préjugés des contemporains sur cette profession' (2009: 121). Similarly, discussing Balzac's *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes* (page references are to the Pléiade edition, full details of which can be found in my bibliography), and returning to the metaphor discussed in the previous section of this chapter, Prendergast remarks that: '[t]he insistent recurrence of animal and predatory metaphors effectively undercuts any temptation the reader might have of an easy distribution of moral sympathies. The conflict is not between 'good' and 'bad', but simply 'une lutte où chacun combattit pour sa passion où [sic] pour ses intérêts' (770). The opposition between society and outlaw, order and anarchy dissolves into a conflict of morally indistinguishable forces, in which the roles of criminal and policeman are, in moral terms, wholly reversible. [...] 'Nous étions le gibier, et nous devenons les chasseurs, voilà tout' (1126)' (1978: 88).

insalubrious underworlds, and yet members also have legitimate lives ‘above ground’ and, as such, can be instrumental in pulling mystery and crime out into those ‘real lives’, out of the *bas-fonds* to be played out in the city itself. To give an example, the first meeting of the *Invisibles* takes place at a Parisian ball, where the secret society members, though masked and under cover of night, are nonetheless placed in immediate proximity to ‘real’ Parisian life.

We are reminded, inevitably, of Lavergne’s description of the relocation of Paris-based mysteries, already evoked in my discussion of the palimpsest trope.<sup>21</sup> The proximity of the underworld to the real world, when not physical, is ideological, as in the numerous instances when the secret societies provide distorted reflections of the very power structures to which they supposedly stand in opposition. In one particularly striking scene, Muflier and Goniglu of the *Loups de Paris* stand trial, accused of betraying the group. The machinations of the *Assises Rouges* prove remarkably similar to those of the official justice system. We are told:

Ceci avait tout l’air d’une cour d’assises. [...]

Derrière eux entrent douze hommes qui se rangent sur un banc un peu plus élevé que leurs sièges. [...]

Douze hommes ! cela ressemblait furieusement à des jurés.

(LOU II: 221-2)

And yet the reflection is decidedly ironic, given that the positions of power in this court can only be held by prisoners condemned to death, sentenced in absentia, or by escaped convicts:

Par une odieuse contrefaçon des lois régulières, ce tribunal était constitué selon les règles de la procédure normale. Un président assisté de deux juges dirigeait les débats. Ces sièges ne pouvaient être occupés [...] que par des condamnés à mort, contumaces ou évadés. (LOU II: 223)<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> See quotation p. 76 (Lavergne 2009: 191-2).

<sup>22</sup> See Prendergast’s discussion of the secret society as a ‘grotesque parody’ of the family model, with particular reference to Balzac’s *Histoire des Treize* (‘the anonymous ‘fraternity’ of the Thirteen, with

The similarity of the entire set-up to the system it purports to subvert is nonetheless striking:

Le greffier commença sa lecture : c'était un document rédigé dans la forme judiciaire et dans lequel – détail des plus curieux – étaient visés les articles du Code d'instruction criminelle. A vrai dire, ce n'était pas une parodie de la procédure régulière. Ses agissements étaient suivis pas à pas, et eût-on fermé les yeux pour écouter qu'on se fût transporté dans une de ces audiences solennelles où la société se défend contre le crime. (LOU II: 224)

This illustrates Simmel's assertion that:

the secret society makes itself into a sort of counter-image of the official world, to which it places itself in contrast. Here we find the ubiquitous sociological norm: that structures which resist larger, encompassing structures through opposition and separation, nevertheless themselves repeat the forms of these structures. (1950: 360)

The idea of the secret society as a negative reproduction of the society which exists 'above ground' is indicative of the ironic, parodic propensity of these texts.<sup>23</sup> The secret societies depicted in the *mystères* could also be said to have a metafictional significance in that, just as the secret society is a reflection (albeit a warped one) of the very institutions it purports to subvert, so the two, apparently antagonistic, modes of cultural production in the nineteenth century, were, in fact, linked by their very opposition. This 'adhésion collective au jeu' (Bourdieu 1998 [1992]: 279) is part of what Bourdieu terms 'l'*illusio* du champ artistique':

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its codes of loyalty and dependence in a context of mutual crime and violence'), *La Fille aux yeux d'or* and *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes*. He refers to '[t]he actual or incipient breakdown of the integrated and hierarchical family unit' and its replacement, in melodrama, by 'new contracts, new 'families', bizarre and disconcerting leagues and associations' (1978: 180).

<sup>23</sup> For a detailed discussion of this propensity, see VI.3 below. As Hamon puts it, 'l'imaginaire (du négatif [...]) est très souvent, au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle, ironique dans ses postures d'écriture. En effet l'ironie n'est-elle pas la figure d'énonciation qui consiste à dire *l'inverse* de ce qu'on veut faire entendre ?' (2001: 296-7). Stählin notes a similar parodic distortion in the religious mystery: 'The enemy's mysteries, in every respect, are *the uncanny opposite, the caricature and perversion* of the divine mysteries' (1937: 33, my emphasis).

Bien qu'ils soient totalement opposés dans leur principe, les deux modes de production culturelle, l'art « pur » et l'art « commercial », sont liés par leur opposition même qui agit à la fois dans l'objectivité, sous la forme d'un espace de positions antagonistes, et dans les esprits, sous la forme de schèmes de perception et d'appréciation qui organisent toute la perception de l'espace des producteurs et des produits. (1998 [1992]: 278)<sup>24</sup>

The notion of an ironic similarity between groups radically opposed on political or cultural grounds is an interesting one, particularly as the distinction between popular literature, typified by the serial novel, and an elite, avant-garde literature, which rejected or subverted the novel, became increasingly pronounced, culminating in the *fin-de-siècle crise du roman*.<sup>25</sup>

Such comparisons and juxtapositions serve to break down the hitherto simplistic binary oppositions of underground and overground, secret and official. The secret society is thus, just like the palimpsest, characterized by an illusory depth.<sup>26</sup> As Letourneux (2007) remarks of the *mystères*, it is the process of initiation, rather than the arrival at and resolution of any supreme mystery, which is more important. The darkness and mystery of the secret societies does not hide any profound secret, but is itself the sum total of the secret.<sup>27</sup> We are reminded of Sontag's opposition to the style of interpretation 'in which, as in Freud, a hidden content is to be revealed by dislodging the obvious content' (Donoghue 1983: 105):

Today [...] the project of interpretation is largely reactionary, stifling. Like the fumes of the automobile and of heavy industry which befoul the urban atmosphere,<sup>28</sup> the effusion of interpretations of art today poisons our sensibilities. [...] To interpret is to impoverish, to deplete the world – in order to set up a *shadow world of "meanings."* [...] The world, our world, is depleted, impoverished enough. Away with all the duplicates of it, until we

<sup>24</sup> See also Bourdieu 1994: 152-3.

<sup>25</sup> See Charle 1979 and Raimond 1966.

<sup>26</sup> See II.3 above, Dillon 2007: 3 and 29, and McDonagh 1987: 211.

<sup>27</sup> See quotation p. 76 above.

<sup>28</sup> The urban analogy is, needless to say, especially apt in the given context.

again experience more immediately what we have.  
(Sontag 1987: 7, my emphasis)<sup>29</sup>

As Donoghue explains, ‘Sontag is against profundity, which makes a claim upon depth as opposed to surface. What she wants is not depth but intricacy of appearances’ (1983: 106). The approach to the text propounded by Sontag reminds us, in turn, of the revised figuration of the palimpsest: a surface phenomenon whose mysteries must be unravelled, rather than a series of layers which must be peeled back to uncover a hidden text.

Sontag’s tirade against interpretation takes on a particular resonance in a popular fiction context. As Couégnas explains:

[i]l y a [...] le plus souvent une espèce de *superficialité* du regard que le roman paralittéraire jette sur les êtres et les choses. Le recours aux clichés ne facilite pas l’analyse *en profondeur* du réel, même si, d’une manière faussement paradoxale, toute une rhétorique et une thématique du *dévoilement*, de l’*élucidation*, de la *révélation au public*, contribuent largement au succès d’une certaine paralittérature fondée sur les « mystères » (...de *Paris*), les « secrets », les « énigmes », des situations « étranges », « curieuses » ou « ténébreuses »... (1992: 102, emphases in original)

Couégnas’s ‘superficialité du regard’, is not only preferable, but imperative, for what is at stake here is not only an artistic ‘depletion’, to return to Sontag’s terms, but an ‘impoverishment’ in its most literal sense; if the initiation and revelation promised by the secret societies were pursued to its natural conclusion (the diegetic equivalent of an over-zealous interpretation), then the lucrative commercial model of the *mystères* would, in fact, be exhausted. Instead, by suggesting a rather more complex notion of *l’envers*, by inviting comparisons with real urban life, or by mingling, at times almost imperceptibly, with it, these groups ensure that our preoccupation

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<sup>29</sup> Donoghue makes some very similar points (1983: 43-5 and 105-6).



remains the intricacy of the surface (of city and text alike), rather than what may be hidden beneath it.

### **Secret societies, recondite readers**

The shift of diegetic focus, from the underground to the surface, which, as we have seen, reflects the revised figuration of the palimpsest, is not the only self-referential aspect of secret societies. The rhetoric of initiation constructed around the societies, via, for example, the codification of costume and language, could be said to apply to the *mystères* themselves, and their readership, as much to the fictional groups.

Costume is frequently used to reinforce the group dynamic. In *Les Assises Rouges*, Lermina's *Loups de Paris* stage their own court of assizes trial, in distinctive garb:

Ils sont vêtus de longues robes noires, le visage noirci [...] ils portent au cou un ruban rouge, collé contre la chair, qui donne l'illusion de la trace laissée par un coup de hache, à supposer qu'après une exécution la tête ait été rapprochée du tronc. (LOU II: 222).

As well as the red cravate, the jurors also wear 'une sorte d'épaulette taillée dans une tête de loup' (LOU II: 222). Such symbols create cohesion within the group, and are also used as a means of identification, as in the first meeting of the *Invisibles*, where the society members recognize their leader via the sign of the Maltese cross formed by diamonds on his chest (INV: 79).

And yet such marks of group identity certainly have their limitations. The semiotic systems of these secret societies are actually rather ambiguous and often a source of confusion rather than an aid to identification. To use Aimard's text as an example, ironically, it is the very anonymity and invisibility of the secret society's members that defines and identifies them: 'nous sommes les *Invisibles*, non

seulement pour les hommes qui vivent en dehors de notre association, mais aussi pour nous-mêmes. [...] si vos masques tombent, vous seriez certes bien étonnés' (INV: 80).<sup>30</sup>

Mask-wearing is a prime example of this. The physical mask is a typical feature of a secret society's uniform, and yet its function is decidedly ambiguous. The mask indicates belonging to the group and yet also hides the identity of the individual wearing it. Indeed, the mask is used repeatedly as a metaphor for hidden thoughts and feelings.<sup>31</sup> It is significant that our first encounter with Aimard's *Invisibles* takes place during a masked ball, where the secret society members are impossible to distinguish from the revellers. It is the familiarity of the mask, and the physical proximity of the mysterious secret society members to the blissfully unaware party-goers, which unsettles the reader.<sup>32</sup>

Codified language is marked by a similar ambiguity. In some respects it binds the groups, who communicate via slang and exchange secret passwords. At the same time, much like the clothing, ceremonies and symbols mentioned above, it can be just as much a source of mystery and confusion. According to Prendergast, '[t]he proper name is a verbal locus of social identity, an index of belonging to a known social world' (1978: 166), but because, as we have seen, the society members operate in a number of different 'social worlds', their numerous 'noms de guerre' or pseudonyms become the source of tremendous confusion and incidences of mistaken

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<sup>30</sup> Although this is certainly another source of the teasing we have come to expect from the *mystères*, this kind of irony and confusion, seemingly at odds with a sense of group identity, would appear to have been a historical reality, and not just a fictional device, as Benjamin notes 'The Comité Invisible <Invisible Committee> [was the] name of a [real] secret society in Lyons' (1999: 611).

<sup>31</sup> See, for example, the marquis d'Harville's reference to the 'mask' worn by his unfaithful wife: 'Oui, je veux aller chez elle et observer le masque doux et perfide sous lequel cette infâme rêve sans doute l'adultère de tout à l'heure' (MP: 288). The marquise herself acknowledges 'ce masque menteur' (MP: 594). On the centrality of performance to urban life, see VI.2 below.

<sup>32</sup> This curious mix of the familiar and the foreign is what Freud termed *Das Unheimliche* (*The Uncanny* in English; *L'inquiétant étrangeté* in French) (2003 [1919]).

identity.<sup>33</sup> In *Les Loups de Paris*, the head of the eponymous criminal gang is known variously as leader Biscarre (or Bisco), Jewish character Blasias, businessman Mancal, and bookseller Germandret. In *Les Invisibles de Paris*, the main character goes under the names of Passe-Partout,<sup>34</sup> le comte de Warrens, le capitaine Noël (159) and M. Riffard (171-2), according to his different activities. As such, these characters could be read as a nod to the large number of authors of popular fiction who resorted to pseudonyms in order to differentiate between their different writing activities, Lermina/Cobb being just one example.<sup>35</sup>

Another example of codified language actually creating or perpetuating mystery rather than providing a key to it is the use by the *Invisibles*, of *la lune* as a codeword. It helps society members to recognize each other, but is otherwise entirely phatic. It is no accident that the moon is a recurrent motif in this novel. It encapsulates the tension between day and night, knowledge and ignorance, showing and concealing. As Hamon explains, the moon sheds light, but is only a reflection of the sun's rays. It is a token gesture towards explanation and clarification, but remains inextricably linked to night, shadow and mystery.<sup>36</sup>

The partial, selective nature of the initiation of secret society members and readers alike is crucial. As Mombert explains, the narrator is a sort of 'false friend' (2006a: 30), who enables our initiation into the secret world, and its secret signs ('[e]n nous faisant suivre pas à pas le parcours initiatique du personnage, jalonné de révélations successives des mystères du groupe, le récit rend lisible le code occulte et nous dévoile les secrets de l'association' (2006a: 31)), and yet also takes care to

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<sup>33</sup> On the subject of agnition, see Eco 1993 [1978]: 27-34.

<sup>34</sup> The name clearly underlines my previous point; secret societies are not confined to a geographical underworld, but infiltrate and operate in all walks of urban life.

<sup>35</sup> On author name in general, see Genette 1987: 41-58; on pseudonymity in particular, see 50-8.

<sup>36</sup> See Hamon 2001: 268-9 and also p. 145 above.

ensure that this is always on his own terms, that the initiation is never complete, and that any revelation of mystery is only partial:

si l'on accepte d'entrer dans le jeu de dévoilement que propose le narrateur, on accepte aussi que le narrateur, qui nous initie aux secrets de ses personnages, nous impose le silence, fasse taire, au moins pendant la durée du récit, notre esprit critique. (2006a: 31)

The proffering of semiotic titbits, of what appear to be linguistic and sartorial keys, gives the reader the impression of being party to various secrets, and yet these keys typically prove deceptive, or emerge as a means of withholding rather than gaining access to secret information. This is clearly a means of creating suspense, which, as we have already seen, equated to a longer and thus more profitable text. But the complexity of the initiatory experience also underlines the problematic relationship of the 'serious writer'<sup>37</sup> to his readership at this time, and principally his alienation, as Prendergast puts it, from an 'ignorant and vulgar' public:

Far from reaching out to the society around him, the artist now tends to recoil in disgust, to emphasize his isolation, to address himself to an elite or an imagined posterity or to withdraw totally into a highly esoteric conception of his art. Thus Stendhal significantly dedicates *La Chartreuse de Parme* to the 'Happy Few' [...] Sainte-Beuve reacts to those who claim to write 'pour le peuple' by affirming that 'il faut viser à satisfaire ses égaux (pares) ou ses supérieurs, et non pas écrire pour ceux qui ont moins de goût et d'esprit que nous; en un mot, il faut viser en haut et non en bas.' Vigny [...] finds himself compelled to distinguish between 'l'élite' and 'la masse idiote'; the contemporary reading public 'cherche dans les arts l'amusant et jamais le beau. De là le succès de la médiocrité.' (1978: 24-5)<sup>38</sup>

The meaning of the text was not offered indiscriminately, but had to be earned by a reader able to distinguish himself from this 'masse idiote' and thereby prove his

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<sup>37</sup> Prendergast makes a distinction between 'serious' writers and 'popular' novelists, 'such as Sue, Dumas, Soulié', defined by their 'complete capitulation to the pressures of the market' (1978: 24)

<sup>38</sup> Prendergast cites Stendhal (1962 [1835-42]: 395), Sainte-Beuve (1868-70: 499) and Vigny (1922: 62 and 60).

worth.<sup>39</sup> While Sue and authors of the other *mystères urbains* were not, of course, the ‘serious writers’ to which Prendergast refers, the initiation of characters and readers into the secret societies of the *mystères*, alternately encouraged and frustrated, could be seen to echo, and perhaps mock, the efforts of authors of more serious literature to include and exclude various groups of readers.

But if secret societies, by problematizing the initiation process, at times draw parallels with a literature targeting a privileged, elite readership, then in other instances they seem to function, conversely, as a metaphor for the ‘masse idiote’. The very fact that the societies are groups, rather than individuals, suggests this more negative role. The idea of an anonymous, collective other is a threatening prospect, culturally as well as socially:

[M]ass, along with related words, is a very problematical term. As Raymond Williams has put it, ‘masses are other people’,<sup>40</sup> our image of a collective other, to which we ourselves do not belong or rather do not see ourselves as belonging. [...] ‘Masses’ is frequently a semantic correlative of ‘mob’, and just as the latter carries overtones of a threat to social order, so the former is often made to speak of a threat to culture and sensibility.  
(Prendergast 1978: 22)

The composition of the popular reading public was as much a source of mystery as their number. Salinas refers to ‘ce public qui, pour soumis qu’il soit aux statistiques

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<sup>39</sup> The distinction between ‘initiates’ and the wider public would continue into the twentieth century. See Donoghue’s discussion of John Crowe Ransom’s ‘Freud and Literature’ (*Saturday Review of Literature*, 4 October 1924): ‘while a work of literature becomes a public property as soon as it is uttered, it becomes such a thing differently in the hands of ‘the many’ and ‘the few’’ (1983: 43). Donoghue recognizes the same distinction, ‘between the carnal and the spiritual sense of a text’, made in the first chapter of Frank Kermode’s *The Genesis of Secrecy*: ‘The distinction is an old one, except for its diction: it is well established as distinguishing between the manifest sense of a text and a latent sense available only to the elect. The manifest sense of a story is what everyone makes of it, more or less; the latent sense is what someone on the inside makes of it. Or it might denote a distinction between an ordinary, straightforward gloss and an act of divination: the gloss would arise from a supposition that the story is nothing more than what it appears to be, the act of divination would arise from the supposition that the story is in some way oracular, yielding its sense not now but later or never. The agent of divination is the insider; the other is the outsider. The insider lives within the circle, the fellowship, the institution, where the score is known; the outsider is content with rougher satisfactions’ (1983: 44-5).

<sup>40</sup> Prendergast’s reference is to Williams (1968: 289).

et aux compatibilités, n'en reste pas moins essentiellement mystérieux et insaisissable' (1950: 370).<sup>41</sup> According to Prendergast, the mysteriousness and the anonymity of the reading public were a direct result of the 'basically economic' and, as such, 'essentially impersonal' relationship between writer and reader (1978:20).

'Popular readers' were, in fact, an extremely heterogeneous mix. In fact, the term was used so freely as to be virtually meaningless. As Clark writes:

[T]he adjective "popular", applied to persons, manners or entertainment in the later nineteenth century, came to mean many, too indefinite things. The word's elusiveness derived from its being used for ideological purposes, to suggest kinds of identity and contact between the classes – ways they belonged together and had interests in common – which did not exist in their everyday life or social practice, but seemed to in the spectacle. There was a sense in which the "nouvelles couches sociales" were nothing in our period, or very little, without the space allocated to them in "popular culture" – which is not to say that they lacked a determinate economic position, only that it was not yet clear, to them or anyone, what it was. (2003: 205)

The secret societies in the *mystères* are characterized by a very similar eclecticism. To take Lermine's text as an example, the *Loups* are portrayed as a motley, *sui generis* assortment of characters. We are reminded of 'Georg Simmel's notion of the 'club of club-haters' and Arthur Conan Doyle's Diogenes Club, a refuge for 'the most unsociable and unclubable men in town'<sup>42</sup> (Gill 2009: 74-5), as well as what Gill refers to as the 'monstrously heterogeneous category' of Parisian bohemia (2009: 181). The *Morts*, despite their very different ideology, are an equally unlikely mix, whose ranks include the erudite Armand de Bernaye, the Englishman Sir Lionel Storigan and the one-armed twins Droite and Gauche. All have been saved from the jaws of death or suicide and share a vague, benevolent, altruistic vision, but otherwise have little in common except their black velvet masks.

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<sup>41</sup> Quoted by Prendergast 1978: 19.

<sup>42</sup> Gill's references are to Simmel 1971: 307 and Doyle 1981: 436.

In mystery narratives, as Prendergast explains, '[w]hat is crucial is not difference but similarity, not division – and it is here that the deep meaning of the mystery plot is located – but connection' (1978: 64). If identifying similarities and making connections between secret society members allows us to gain some purchase on the text, then, in much the same way, identifying (if not delineating in any detail) a group of 'popular readers' gave an appeasing sense of mastery to a bourgeois literary establishment confronted with a readership whose composition and evolution was a source of great disquiet.

The identification of 'popular readers', the links between whom, much like those between secret society members, are somewhat tenuous, was useful in that it fed back into the aforementioned rhetoric of initiation. Identifying such a group, however heterogeneous its members might be, meant that those who did so could position themselves outside that group, by cultivating 'a difference from [those below them] which hinged on [their] skill – [their] privileged place – as consumer of [images of their lives]' (Clark 2003: 205). Prendergast agrees that:

When [...] we speak of the nineteenth-century 'reading public', we are speaking rather of an image of that public, an image that comes down to us via the statements and views of a relatively small group of highly articulate individuals, who furthermore generally see themselves not as included in, but as standing apart from that public. (1978: 20)

Just as a simplistic definition of the 'reading public', and popular readers in particular, was a reassuring but artificial construct for a literary establishment faced with unprecedented change, secret societies in the *mystères urbains* were a convenient narrative device promising similarity, connection and order in the face of difference, division and mystery.

### **From groups to individuals**

Unsurprisingly, the arbitrary, precarious nature of collective identity frequently causes it to break down in the *mystères*, providing the opportunity for a number of would-be individual detectives and criminals to emerge. The contrived groups tend to give way to what Mombert terms ‘une sorte d’aristocratie héroïque’ (2006a: 26) and ‘la puissance du héros occulte’ (2006a: 30). Mombert makes this point with reference to Salvator in *Les Mohicans de Paris*, but we see the same thing occurring in, for example, *Les Loups de Paris*, where the eponymous secret society is dogged by infighting, allowing the ruthlessly ambitious Biscarre, whose very personal agenda stems from his unrequited love for Marie de Mauvillers, to emerge as the criminal figure *par excellence*, *Le Roi du Mal*.

Similarly, in the *Club des Morts*, despite much group-oriented rhetoric (Martial, as a new member, is told, ‘oubliez votre personnalité, dépouillez votre égoïsme’ (LOU I: 111) and, ‘Qui est avec nous [...] ne possède plus rien en propre. Tout à nous, ceci est notre devise’ (LOU I: 176)), each member has his own very personal axe to grind. Martial wants to find his father’s murderers and bring them to justice. He initially gives the group a written account of his life to read on his behalf, and we are told, ‘Martial [...] se disposa à écouter le récit de sa vie comme s’il eût entendu la confession d’un autre. C’était une première étape vers le détachement de soi-même’ (114), but is unable to resist taking over the storytelling himself. Similarly, Marie’s charitable work is her way of easing the pain of being cruelly separated from her child by the spurned Biscarre. The secret society’s rules are coloured by her very personal preoccupation. The initiation test she sets Martial, for example, is (somewhat disappointingly for the reader expecting action and adventure) simply to visit his mother’s grave and ask for her forgiveness. The



various titles given to the volumes of both novels reflect this shift of emphasis from the group to the individual. The first volume titles of both refer to the secret societies, *Le Club des Morts* (LOU I) and *Les Compagnons de la Lune* (INV I), whereas the titles of later volumes are the names of individual characters, such as *Le Roi du Mal* (LOU III) and *Passe-Partout*, *Le Comte de Warrens*, *La Cigale* and *Hermosa* (INV II, III, IV and V).

In terms of individual detective figures, a number of society members show flashes of detective promise. We see Martial, with characteristic youthful zeal, ‘saisi par le désir de percer le mystère qui l’entourait’ (LOU I: 105). We see Belen tracking footprints in his underground haunt (LOU I: 48), and also on the trail of Mancal/Germandret (LOU II: 40). But it is perhaps Jacques who emerges as the most interesting detective character, as his own learning curve in many respects mirrors that of the reader. Lermina seems to acknowledge his special status, and even has him mistaken for an *agent de police* (LOU II: 66), a misunderstanding of which Jacques takes full advantage. He is unique in that he stands outside the system of secret societies, mocked, tricked and frozen out by the *Loups*, and completely oblivious to the existence of the *Morts*, even though his mother is their leader and his own disappearance is at their very core. Like the reader, who finds himself swathed in mystery at every turn, but denied a comprehensive explanation of it, Jacques’s interest is piqued and his detective skills activated: ‘A tout prix, il voulait connaître le mot de l’énigme. [...] Quoi qu’il en fût, son but était fixé. Arriver par tous les moyens à la vérité [...]’ (LOU II: 62).

Cawelti sees a clear distinction between texts such as the *mystères*, whose emphasis is on collective guilt, and the later detective novel, where guilt is attributed to individuals (and by an individual: the detective):

the detective story stands in marked contrast to those important late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century novels that explored the lower depths of society and of individual psyche and returned from their quests with a general indictment of the guilt of the respectable middle classes for their indifference and exploitation of the poor and their illicit and hidden dreams of sex and aggression. [...] instead of laying bare the hidden guilt of bourgeois society the detective-intellectual uses his demonic powers to project the general guilt onto specific and overt acts of particular individuals, thus restoring the serenity of the middle-class order. (1976: 95-6)

I would qualify this distinction by arguing that if the *mystères urbains*, and especially Sue's *Mystères* and other early versions, emphasize the collective then, in subsequent versions, and in the *mystères* which feature secret societies in particular, it is the shift from the collective to the individual which is emphasized and 'diegeticized' across multiple volumes.

To conclude, secret societies play a central role in a 'rewriting' of the urban underworld which, just like the palimpsest, no longer constitutes a buried secret to be unearthed, but must instead be disentangled from 'normal' life at the surface level. This is just one of a number of self-referential nods: diegetic and extra-diegetic questions of identity appear to be closely linked, as the secret societies also invite us to reflect on the identity of an elusive, arguably even illusory, 'community' of readers, as well as raising questions about the generic identity of the texts.

The final section of this chapter will examine the question of gender in the *mystères*. By analysing the depictions of female characters in my corpus, I will consider the implications, for both city and text, of 'rewriting the feminine'.

#### IV. 3 – SEX AND THE CITY: REWRITING THE FEMININE

In ‘Sémiologie et urbanisme’, Barthes describes urban space as inherently ‘*érotique*’, explaining: ‘j’emploie indifféremment *érotisme* ou *socialité*. La ville, essentiellement et sémantiquement, est le lieu de rencontre avec l’autre’ (1967: 445, emphases in original).<sup>43</sup> As if to reinforce the equivalence between city and text we have come to expect, the ‘eroticism’ which inflects our encounters with the city also characterizes our engagement with the text. Prendergast explains the equivalence thus:

Let us say that cities and narratives have at least one thing in common: they are both desire-producing machines. Rousseau denounces the city for creating an endless multiplication of desires and a correspondingly restless quest for impossible gratification [...]. Similarly, desire in narrative and desire for narrative are what keeps narrative going and what keeps our reading of narrative going. (1992: 28)

If texts in general have an ‘erotic’ dimension, then this is especially true of the serial, which is predicated on the deferral of desire, so as to promote continued consumption (Hayward 1997: 2) and of popular texts in general, as Hayward explains, evoking the ‘emphatic physicality’ of the thrills provided by ‘pornography, sensation novels, action-adventure movies, and so on’ (1997: 38). A ‘concerted effort to distinguish fiction that affects the body from fiction that affects only the mind’ was a means of distinguishing a growing mass of readers from a select elite as the publishing industry developed (Hayward 1997: 38). The pornographic novel *En plein air : Mystères nocturnes des Champs-Élysées à Paris*,<sup>44</sup> in which a voyeuristic

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<sup>43</sup> On meeting, exchange and interaction in the city, and the resultant ‘*érotisation continuelle*’, see also Soucy 1971: 8 and 33.

<sup>44</sup> While Pike (2007: 160) attributes a date of 1899 to this novel, the catalogue of the Bibliothèque nationale de France lists only a 1935 edition. Irrespective of the date, the aptness of the pornographic approach to the city cannot be denied.

narrator participates in and observes a number of lurid sexual encounters with strangers, could thus be said to have more in common with Sue's *Mystères de Paris* than just its titular nod.

If city and text are to be understood as essentially 'erotic' entities, then the gender roles pertaining to both are clearly not to be ignored. In their excellent introduction to *Intertextuality: theories and practices* (1990: 1-44), Still and Worton explain that 'the sexual figuring of writer-reader relations', particularly in the context of intertextuality, has a long history:

Theories of intertextuality have, from the outset, referred at least obliquely to sexual hierarchies. The act of (creative) writing has itself often been regarded as having dangerous 'feminine' or 'effeminate' overtones, while historically writers have been predominantly male and *some* aspects of writing have been celebrated as quintessentially active and hence (in an economy which embraces Aristotle, Freud and many more) virile. The act of creation itself, despite the many metaphorical associations with giving birth, can – warding off the maternal metaphor – be related to the myth of the male god as sole creator: wisdom springs from Zeus's head, and Cicero took pride in his title 'father of the fatherland', arguing that the good orator is indeed the founding father of a community and hence of a sociolect.  
(Still and Worton 1990: 29-30, emphasis in original)<sup>45</sup>

In fact, sexualized, gendered approaches to intertextuality are far too numerous to explore exhaustively here,<sup>46</sup> although, in light of the prominence of Genette in my methodological framework, the 'concern with perversity, eroticism and love' which

<sup>45</sup> See also Dillon 2007: 91.

<sup>46</sup> I select just a couple of examples here, from works to which I have already referred: Dillon discusses 'the hymen [as] an appropriate figure for the relationship between the texts of the palimpsest. [...] [T]hey exist in a hymenic fusion or marriage which at the same time preserves their separate identities and inscribes difference within the heart of the identity of the palimpsest. [...] Any text exists as the hymen – the marriage and division – of [Kristeva's] pheno-text and geno-text [see also Dillon 2007: 91-2], of the text and the infinite possibilities of palimpsestuous textuality that engenders it' (Dillon 2007: 97). Hamon explains that: 'l'écrivain est une sorte de « plaque sensible », recevant des impressions et empreintes du monde extérieur, et il les reproduit dans son œuvre, par creusements et par « reliefs », lesquels creusements et reliefs s'imprimeront à leur tour en symétrie, par emboîtements symboliques (*sun-bolon*), reliefs mâles dans creux femelles, dans le cerveau du lecteur « impressionnable ». Mais « l'impression » peut s'exercer non seulement du réel à « l'esprit » de l'écrivain, mais aussi d'écrivain à écrivain, de texte à texte. On a vu [...] que ce champ métaphorique de l'impression-imprégnation (le corps, l'écrivain et le lecteur comme cires molles impressionnables) ne demandait qu'à se charger de connotations sexuées, notamment féminines' (2001: 276).

Dillon (2007: 91) identifies in *Palimpsestes* cannot go unmentioned.<sup>47</sup> But it is Barthes, according to Still and Worton, ‘with his reversible figure of the body as text/text as body, who is most associated with the eroticisation of intertextuality’ (1990: 20). This approach can be charted from *S/Z* (1970), in which Barthes draws parallels between hermeneutic and sexual desire and differentiates for the first time between the ‘texte lisible’ and the ‘texte scriptible’, to *Le plaisir du texte* (1973a), in which the differences between these two types of text are made explicitly erotic: the readerly text is a ‘texte de plaisir’ and the writerly a ‘texte de jouissance’. Barthes pursues his erotic take on intertextuality in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* (1975), telling us ‘that he finds certain words as used by certain writers or by certain schools of thought particularly delirious and seductive’ (Still and Worton 1990: 18): ‘L’intertexte n’est pas forcément un champ d’influences ; c’est plutôt une musique de figures, de métaphores, de pensées-mots; c’est le signifiant comme *sirène*’ (1975: 174, emphasis in original). The idea of ‘siren signifiers’ (Still and Worton 1990: 18) while obviously a musical metaphor, also evokes the image of a seductive mermaid, reminiscent of the imagery central to Zaccone’s *Pieuvres de Paris* (1878), to which I will refer in some detail in this section: ‘Mortimer se sentit profondément troublé un moment, au contact de ce corps charmant qui s’enlaçait à lui avec des mouvements de sirène [...]’ (PIEUV: 187). From the outset, then, the interactions between male and female characters within the diegesis, given the ‘the sexual figuring of writer-reader relations’ already evoked, can be seen to have a meta-diegetic resonance. This is the particular line of enquiry I will pursue in this final section of this chapter, in which I will analyse representations of femininity in the *mystères urbains*.

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<sup>47</sup> Dillon’s observation is no doubt made in reference to remarks such as the following: ‘[S]i l’on aime vraiment les textes, on doit bien souhaiter, de temps en temps, en aimer (au moins) deux à la fois’ (Genette 1982: 557).

While I have already touched on the importance of the sexual connotations implicit to the numerous invitations to ‘percer’ or ‘pénétrer’ the mysteries of a feminized city,<sup>48</sup> I will now explore the importance of sexual dynamics and metaphors, to both city and text, in more detail. I will begin by considering characters and situations which seem to suggest a coexistence of the masculine and the feminine, and thereby reject the assumption of antithetical gender categories, allowing gender to emerge as a palimpsestuous construct, rather than a binary system. In attempting to ascertain the significance of this gender confusion, I will then explore the ideas of reading as a feminine activity and writing as a masculine activity. Gauthier (2011) makes a crucial observation with regard to the representation of women in the *mystères*, which will be my starting point for these investigations and hypotheses: ‘les personnages féminins sont construits *en fonction de leurs rapports à la séduction*’ (2011: 326, my emphasis). With this in mind, he identifies three types of female character: ‘*la femme à séduire*, qui est une proie pour les hommes, *la femme séductrice*, qui fait de la séduction une arme redoutable dont elle use sur les hommes,’<sup>49</sup> et *la femme hors-séduction*, que son apparence physique rapproche des hommes’ (2011: 276, my emphases). While Gauthier’s categories work well in the context of his own study, I have adapted them here to suit my own purposes, concentrating on the ‘femme à séduire’ (or object of seduction), a character whose role clearly echoes that of the feminine reader and the ‘femme séductrice’ (seductress), whose role invites comparisons with that of the masculine

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<sup>48</sup> See III.1 above. Physical penetration is, of course, a metaphor for interpretation (as Prendergast (1992: 149) notes when discussing Baudelaire). As we have seen, the continued success of the *mystères* hinged on the fact that, despite much teasing and titillation of the reader, this erotic promise remained, in fact, unfulfilled.

<sup>49</sup> Nathan (1985) makes a similar distinction, between ‘filles flétries’ (81-122) and ‘femmes à vendre’ (123-150). Note that the term *flétrissure* is characterized by an ambiguity especially appropriate to this palimpsest-inspired discussion: it denotes a ‘withering’ or ‘fading’ but can also mean a ‘stain’ or ‘blemish’.

writer.<sup>50</sup> After examining these two types of female in turn, I will consider characters that fall conclusively into neither of the two categories, but instead combine masculine and feminine characteristics, as well as writing and reading activities. In this way, I will show that representations of gender echo the way in which processes of reading and writing, especially in the context of intertextuality, coexist in a relationship of palimpsestuous intimacy, rather than functioning as entirely separate activities.

Instances of gender ambiguity are numerous in the *mystères*. Rodolphe, for example, is described in distinctly feminine terms. The first descriptions of him evoke ‘sa taille moyenne, svelte, parfaitement proportionnée’ and ‘sa main élégante et blanche’, concluding that, ‘[s]es traits étaient régulièrement beaux, trop beaux peut-être pour un homme’ (MP: 41). In *Les Nuits de Paris*, a very similar description of an apparently new, male character referred to as ‘le Monténégrin’ ends in the discovery that the character in question is, in fact, a woman in disguise (Fernande, who faints on discovering that her father has been murdered). The character’s mouth is described as ‘petite comme celle d’une jeune fille’ (NUITS: 62) and we are told that ‘[Franck] admirait cette belle tête de jeune homme qu’on eût désiré voir sur le corps d’une belle femme’ (63). References to ‘la douceur’ and ‘la délicatesse élégante’ (62) are cleverly juxtaposed with more masculine descriptions, for example of ‘ce rayon *profond et pénétrant* qui partait de son œil bleu’ (63, my emphasis). In the same way, a number of female characters are compared to men. The landlady of the tapis-franc, known as l’ogresse, for example, is ‘grande, robuste, corpulente, haute en couleur et quelque peu barbue. Sa voix rauque, virile, ses gros bras, ses larges mains, annoncent une force peu commune’ (MP: 38). References to virility are

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<sup>50</sup> Note that I do not ignore Gauthier’s ‘femme hors séduction’. While Gauthier places her outside the system of sexual dynamics, I concentrate on her masculine characteristics, which, like those of the ‘femme séductrice’, invite comparison with the writer.

also recurrent in descriptions of la Louve, who is ‘grande, virile’ (610) and moves through the water ‘d’une vigueur toute virile’ (855) when she saves Fleur-de-Marie from drowning.

The conception of gender that emerges from such descriptions is clearly at odds with the ‘sharply defined contrasts’ otherwise typical of the ‘clear-cut Manichean or melodramatic worldview’ (Prendergast 1978: 91 and 93-4). If wealth and poverty, success and failure, and heroes and villains adhere to a tidy binary system (Prendergast 1978: 91 and 110), then this system is decidedly rejected by masculine and feminine categories. A particularly emphatic illustration of this is to be found in one of the ‘Épisodes du carnaval à Nice de l’année 1882’, a short anecdote from Zybinn’s *Mystères de Nice*, in which two young men are intrigued by a masked woman they see amid the flowers on a carnival float, prompting them to follow her home (Appendix VIII.4.2). The dizzying effect of a series of unveilings (this is not just a man dressed as a woman, but a woman dressed as a man... dressed as a woman) serve as a demonstration that gender is a much more complex construct than other aspects of identity, dealt with as antithetical pairings in the *mystères*. We are reminded of ‘contemporary queer theory’s deconstruction of the binary gender system’ (Dillon 2007: 117), and of Freud’s contention that ‘each individual is essentially bisexual and has to repress either their masculine or feminine self, and their heterosexual or homosexual desire.’<sup>51</sup> Whereas heterosexual adult sexuality is the result of an effective process of palimpsesting in which the underlying text is successfully erased, in queer sexuality both texts coexist on the surface of the palimpsest, transversing, twisting and troubling the other’ (Dillon 2007: 123).<sup>52</sup> Like Dillon, my intention is to look beyond the social and political implications of the

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<sup>51</sup> Dillon refers to Freud 1991a and 1991b.

<sup>52</sup> Dillon devotes an entire chapter to ‘Queering the Palimpsest’ (2007: 102-126).



gender confusions observed in these texts, and concentrate instead on the implications of such confusions for our understanding of intertextuality. To this end, I will now consider the links between femininity and readership, and between masculinity and authorship.

### **Objects of seduction**

As Angenot explains, the cliché of the female nineteenth-century reader had its roots in an eighteenth-century vogue for sentimental fiction: ‘nous voyons apparaître aux alentours de 1760 une première forme de paralittérature romanesque, larmoyante et sentimentale, imitée de Rousseau et de Richardson. [...] une littérature destinée ‘aux dames’ [...]’ (1982: 309). After 1830, however, ‘[l]e roman, considéré depuis le dix-huitième siècle comme un genre destiné aux dames, change alors d’image institutionnelle sinon de public réel : il devient, avec l’apparition du feuilleton, un genre non plus ‘féminin’ mais ‘populaire’ [...]’ (Angenot 1982: 310).

Many genres published in *feuilleton* form were now based around male characters and traditionally male pursuits and, as such, had an obvious appeal to a masculine readership. Queffélec refers, for example, to the *roman exotique* and *roman maritime* which flourished under the Second Republic (1989: 51), as well as to the rise of the *roman scientifique* between 1866 and 1875 (1989: 67). If the *roman sentimental* was now just one of an increasingly diverse repertoire of popular genres, the association of popular fiction with femininity persisted, no doubt thanks to its pejorative connotations. As Hayward explains, the equation of the mass audience with groups such as women, or the undereducated and immature, has traditionally been a way of conferring a reassuringly inferior identity onto an otherwise anonymous and therefore threatening group (1997: 7).

The role of the female reader, seduced by the text of a male writer, is echoed by the ‘femme à séduire’ character, seduced by the male. Significantly, this relationship, from the perspective of the woman, is often shown to be one of torment, suffering, victimization and passivity.<sup>53</sup> Sue’s Fleur-de-Marie, whose anguish is a direct result of her having been forced into prostitution, is, of course, the most obvious example, but we might also mention Louise Morel, raped by Jacques Ferrand, and Edmée Ducoudray of Zaccone’s *Pieuvres de Paris*, who falls in love with Edgar Mortimer but, tormented by his past relationship with a Parisian courtesane, resolves to resist his charms. The pejorative connotations given to the seduction of female characters clearly invite us to interpret them as representative of a naïve readership, whose relationship to popular fiction is characterized by an equivalent ‘seduction’ (narrative, rather than sexual).

The fact that many of the female characters have texts read to them by male characters is significant in this equation. Madame Pipelet, for example, asks Rodolphe to read her a note she has received from Charles Robert (Clémence d’Harville’s lover):

[...] la portière avait décacheté la lettre qui lui était adressée, elle la tournait en tous sens ; après quelques moments d’embarras, elle dit à Rodolphe :

– C’est toujours Alfred qui est chargé de lire mes lettres, parce que je ne le sais pas. Est-ce que vous voudriez bien... monsieur... (MP: 212)

If this masculine mediation of the reading process is a necessity for Madame Pipelet, it is a pleasant, romantic element of the courtship ritual for Rigolette, who describes François Germain reading aloud to her thus:

Tenez, M. Germain, mon dernier voisin, passait toutes ses soirées comme ça avec moi ; il ne s’en plaignait pas !... Il m’a lu tout Walter Scott... C’est ça qui

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<sup>53</sup> See also Gauthier 2011: 295.

était amusant! Quelquefois, le dimanche, quand il faisait mauvais, au lieu d'aller au spectacle et de sortir, il achetait quelque chose chez le pâtissier, nous faisions une vraie dînette dans ma chambre, et puis après nous lisions... Ça m'amusait presque autant que le théâtre. (MP: 474)<sup>54</sup>

The presence of these male intermediaries in the reading process is crucial in underlining the passivity of the female characters.<sup>55</sup> When they are not acting as intermediaries, male characters are the writers of texts, which have particularly powerful effects on the female characters who read them. When, on visiting Rigolette, who has just received a letter from the wrongfully imprisoned François Germain, Rodolphe remarks that she looks as though she has been crying, she confirms her emotional reaction to his letter:<sup>56</sup>

– Je crois bien que j'ai pleuré !... Il y a de quoi ! Pauvre Germain ! Tenez, lisez. – Et Rigolette remit à Rodolphe la lettre du prisonnier. Si ce n'est pas à fendre le cœur !

[...]

Oh ! il faudra bien qu'il soit acquitté... Il n'y aura qu'à lire aux juges la lettre qu'il m'a écrite : ça suffira, n'est-ce pas, monsieur Rodolphe? (MP: 685-8)

In Zaccone's *Nuits de Paris*, an even more explicit link is made between the 'femme à séduire' and the reader, between diegetic and meta-diegetic seduction, when Sylvia's love for Octave is explained as being a result of his resemblance to a *feuilleton* hero (Appendix VIII.4.3).

<sup>54</sup> Note that, unlike Madame Pipelet, Rigolette is not illiterate, as she later reads letters sent to her by François Germain from prison.

<sup>55</sup> This passivity is central to the notion of the 'prostituée vertueuse', who is an object, rather than an agent, of seduction, with more redeeming qualities than faults. On the reorientation of the 'prostituée vertueuse' cliché, see Gauthier (2011: 286-7). Gauthier notes in particular that details of the prostitute's profession are frequently elided, in favour of the depiction of a number of positive attributes.

<sup>56</sup> As Still and Worton explain, this 'feminising, emotional effect of reading (acting) poetry is a contributory factor in Plato's banning it from the Republic' (1990: 5).

### Agents of seduction

At the opposite pole from the ‘femme à séduire’, whose role in the economy of the text I have compared to that of the reader, is the ‘femme séductrice’, whose status can be compared to that of the writer. The comparison of the writer to an illicit temptress can be traced as far back at Plato, in whose political works, *The Republic* and *The Laws*, ‘poetry and the other arts are presented as potentially dangerous for the virtuous state which must be peopled with rational and virtuous beings’ (Still and Worton 1990: 31). An explicit analogy between the writer and the prostitute, which hinged on the marginal status of both, was popularized in the nineteenth century by Balzac’s *Illusions perdues* (1836-1843).<sup>57</sup>

In the *mystères*, the analogy between writing and seduction is pursued insistently. In Zybin’s *Mystères de Nice*, for example, ‘Les trois sœurs’ (NICE I: 99-106) tells the story of three English sisters, Betzy, Kitty and Mary, who live together in the city. They are described as being extremely independent, having lost their parents and their governess and we are told, among other details, that ‘elles buvaient du vin comme des hommes’ (100). When a Dutch baron, Van-Lotendie, hires the rez-de-chaussée of the building where they live, Betzy and Mary are consumed with jealousy at his preference for Kitty. When it is decided that Kitty and the baron will marry, the two sisters resolve to separate them. To this end, they send poisonous, anonymous letters, both to Kitty, claiming that the baron is actually just a lowly tailor’s assistant (a significant profession, if we remember the notion of the text as ‘tissu’) who has been lucky enough to win money in Monte-Carlo, and to the baron, maligning Kitty as a ‘fille perdue’. Though the sisters eventually confess what they have done when they realize the upset they have caused, and the lovers are

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<sup>57</sup> On writers as ‘venal word-merchants’ and ‘whores of discourse’ in Balzac, see Prendergast (1992: 24). See also Prendergast 1978: 31 and 1992: 139. On the ‘unmistakable continuity between literary and literal prostitution’ in Balzac’s *La Torpille*, see Farrant (2002: 215).

reunited, we are struck by the lasting effect on Kitty, even after her marriage, as we are told that: ‘Le désir de Kitty était celui de ne pas avoir de filles’ (106). Similar parallels between writing and seduction are drawn in *Les Pieuvres de Paris*, when Fanny Balcam, the courtesane with whom Edgar Mortimer is in love, writes a note to his father confessing her love for him and agreeing to marry him (PIEUV: 158). Writing is thus repeatedly associated with dishonest sexual machinations and the power wielded by these women, as both writers and seducers, gives them a distinctly masculine agency.

### **The reader-consumer**

Interestingly, it is not just writing that is portrayed as a masculine activity as, via the metaphor of reading as consumption and ingestion,<sup>58</sup> the hitherto passive female could be said to take on a new sexual agency. Feminine meekness and passivity, give way, via the act of consumption, to a masculine aggression and appropriation<sup>59</sup> and female characters appear to reject their role as objects of seduction and assume the more active role of seductresses. Although the role of Fleur-de-Marie remains one of submission throughout Sue’s novel, she seems fully aware of the symbolic importance of her teeth (integral, obviously, to the act of consumption), hence her pride at having retained her ‘petites dents blanches’ in the face of la Chouette’s threats (Appendix VIII.4.4).

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<sup>58</sup> On the eroticism common to food, the city and the text, see Barthes: ‘la nourriture [...] [est] véritablement [une] activité [...] érotique [...] dans la société de consommation’ (1967: 445). On ‘Nietzsche’s distinction between responsive, receptive woman and productive man; between consumer and producer’, see Donoghue (1983: 64). On ‘the importance of the metaphor of ‘consumption’ in Barthes’s theory of the *texte lisible*’, see Prendergast (1978: 186). On ‘the Quintilian metaphor of reading as ingestion’, see Still and Worton (1990: 8).

<sup>59</sup> This violent, masculine side to consumption can also be seen in Balzac: ‘Eat or be eaten, destroy or be destroyed, these are the fundamental imperatives or ‘laws’ [of] the *Comédie humaine*’ (Prendergast 1978: 97-8).

Other female characters, such as Cecily, enlisted to punish Jacques Ferrand, take their role as ‘consumer’ a step further, seducing and ‘devouring’ male victims (Appendix VIII.4.5).<sup>60</sup> Cecily’s aim, ‘to inflame the lawyer’s passion without satisfying it’ (Praz 1970: 208) is clearly akin to that of the popular novelist, and the phallic dagger she carries to defend herself equivalent to the author’s pen.

While the *femme-vampire* was a feature of the *roman gothique*, it was also, as Palacio explains in some detail, an image central to Decadent fiction, which was characterized by an insistent assimilation of the oral and the sexual, the mouth<sup>61</sup> and the vagina, and of gluttony and lust (Palacio 1994: 53-4): ‘La femme de la Décadence porte en effet, comme une lésion ou une vulnération, une bouche gorgée de sang qu’elle ne demande qu’à dégorger, une bouche qui saigne comme une plaie’ (Palacio 1994: 61). Alice, *la Buveuse de sang*, of *Les Pieuvres*, who drinks blood as a therapy for anaemia, and is startingly indifferent to the bloody spectacle of her daily treatments (Appendix VIII.4.6) thus corresponds precisely to Palacio’s description of the Decadent female. Zaccone’s use of this otherwise well-worn male cliché in *Les Pieuvres* anticipates some remarkably similar scenes in Rachilde’s *Marquise de Sade* (1996 [1887]), in which the young heroine, Mary Barbe, is entranced when she witnesses the slaughter of an ox whose blood is to be drunk by her consumptive mother. The bloodthirsty female is a violent, voracious consumer, rather than a passive one, whose new agency is not merely sexual, but also has implications for her status in relation to the text. Although none of my corpus texts were actually written by women, the role of women in the elaboration of the text (and especially the serial text) was, clearly, increasingly important.

As Palacio goes on to explain, linked to oral, sexual imagery is:

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<sup>60</sup> See also Praz 1970: 207-9. On the *femme-vampire*, see also Gauthier 2011: 302.

<sup>61</sup> Palacio refers to the Decadent fixation with the mouth, lips and teeth as a veritable ‘*buccomanie*’ (1994: 55).

[une] thématique de l'effusion, dans laquelle transparaît la hantise du cycle menstruel, « la maladie menstruelle de la femme ». Toute une thématique secondaire du poisseux, du visqueux et de l'englué s'élabore ainsi à partir du corps féminin décadent, où dominant, mais non exclusivement, les flux sanguins. La femme de la Décadence devient, pour ainsi dire, la somme de ses sucs et de ses sécrétions, dans une finalité toujours plus ou moins digestive. (1994: 62)

In light of this remark, many evocations of the city in the *mystères* take on a new, sexualized resonance. Sue's descriptions, at the beginning of *Les Mystères de Paris*, of the 'murs humides' and 'le ruisseau d'eau noirâtre qui coulait au milieu des pavés fangeux' as well as 'des étalages de charbonniers, de tripiers ou de revendeurs de mauvaises viandes' (MP: 33) evoke this secret city space in distinctly feminine terms.<sup>62</sup>

The image of blood, or bodily fluids, being exchanged is also important in that it reinforces the idea of a dialogue between otherwise distinct male and female categories. As Palacio puts it: 'L'originalité de la Décadence [...] c'est premièrement d'avoir conçu le masculin et le féminin dans un véritable rapport de vases communicants [...]' (1994: 62). Rather than being exclusively masculine or feminine, characteristics must be seen to pass, via processes of consumption or transfusion, between the two (Palacio 1994: 54 and 66).

As Palacio explains, references to suction, absorption, aspiration and ingestion are indicative of an appropriation or assimilation of the masculine by the feminine: 'Tout geste érotique (et d'abord le baiser) devient ainsi processus d'appropriation de l'homme par la femme à travers un ensemble de métaphores prandiales où dominant la succion, l'absorption, l'aspiration, l'ingestion' (1994: 57). Nowhere are such metaphors more convincingly showcased than in Zaccone's

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<sup>62</sup> On a similar feminization/sexualization of the city seen in later, Decadent fiction (Jean Lombard's *L'Agonie* (1888)), see Palacio 1994: 59.

*Pieuvres de Paris*, whose central premise is the comparison of Parisian women to malevolent octopi (Appendix VIII.4.7).

This sexualized appropriation or assimilation of the masculine by the feminine could be said to reflect the *rapprochement* of reading and writing processes which characterizes intertextuality. As Still and Worton explain, with reference to Quintilian's metaphor of liquefaction, liquid imagery is a particularly apt way of evoking the conflation of reading and writing activities, the transformation of the read into the written (1990: 7 and 32). What we write is 'a pulped version of what we have read', and reading is 'a performative act of criticism and interpretation' (1990: 7), rather than an independent and passive act.<sup>63</sup>

### Conflation of reading and writing activities

Arguably the most interesting portrayals of feminine readers and masculine writers in the *mystères* are to be found as different facets of the same character. Perhaps the best examples of this are in Balzac's *La Muse du département*<sup>64</sup> and *Albert Savarus*, published together, the latter text under the title *Rosalie*,<sup>65</sup> as part of *Les Mystères de province* (1843).

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<sup>63</sup> The imagery of octopi and liquefaction in Zaccone's novel is especially resonant for the modern French crime fiction adept, who brings to the text a knowledge of the collective literary project inaugurated in the 1990s known as 'la Poulpe', an early manifestation of 'fan fiction'. The project is discussed in some detail by Platten (2011: 203-11).

<sup>64</sup> This significant title is a clear indication of the pertinence of this text to our debate on masculine/feminine writers/readers. If the representation of the muse (the *source* of inspiration) as female has a long history, the *inspired* has also long been associated with the feminine: 'Plato puts forward the view in *Ion* that good poets compose because they are inspired and possessed like Bacchic maidens under the influence of Dionysus [...] Plato is not, of course, alone, either in his representation of the muse, the source of inspiration, as female, [just as a feminized nature is often a source for the artist or, as in Horace, a pattern for him to follow] or in his representation of the inspired as feminine. Longinus compares the new poet, imitating the great poets of the past to the Pythian priestesses impregnated by Apollo [on Longinus, see also Still and Worton 1990: 5]' (Still and Worton 1990: 31-2).

<sup>65</sup> As explained in the Garnier Frères critical edition of *La Muse...*, as the novel was unfinished at the end of the second volume, it actually spilled over into the *Rosalie* volume: 'le roman n'était pas achevé à la fin [du] deuxième volume. Il a donc « débordé » sur le troisième dont il occupe les 48 premières pages, *Rosalie* [...] commençant seulement à la page 51. C'est cette erreur de calcul qui a



*La Muse du département* tells the story of Dinah de la Baudraye, imprisoned in an unhappy marriage in the provincial town of Sancerre, an avid reader, '[p]assionnée de collections, de bric-à-brac, d'autographes, et de littérature' (Mozet) and founder of a 'société littéraire'. As Farrant points out, Dinah's role as reader impinges on her real life:

the insidious ploys of empathetic, 'bleeding heart' literature encourage an identification between author, heroines, and readers which may lead to the very opposite of the authenticity to which all aspire – to Dinah's imitation of Sand's dress and speech, to her learning how to suffer – as much from literature as from life (iv. 657)<sup>66</sup> – and to the confusions of category which lead [...] Dinah to mistake Lousteau's clever exploitation of their discourse for true love [...]. (2002: 286).

But if Dinah is guilty of the typically feminine confusion of literature and real life,<sup>67</sup> at other times she displays rather more masculine characteristics: 'elle garde une réelle indépendance d'esprit, de caractère et conduite' (Mozet). She is a writer, as well as a reader, penning poetry under the pseudonym Jan Diaz. The Parisian journalist Lousteau seduces Dinah, but is a mediocre writer, a 'Manfred<sup>68</sup> du feuilleton' (Balzac 1976-81: iv. 700), who is unable to transfer his sexual prowess to his work and so relies on Dinah to write on his behalf: 'Balzac met ainsi son héroïne entre deux impuissants, son mari qui ne lui fait pas d'enfants, et son amant qui lui fait des enfants mais dont elle écrit les livres qu'il signe' (Mozet). As Farrant observes, '[t]he epilogue's apparent union, the happy family of Baudraye's 'voici

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contraint probablement le romancier et son éditeur à inscrire [le] titre collectif si bizarre de *Dinah et Rosalie* !' (1970: 372). *Dinah et Rosalie* may well sound bizarre to the modern reader, accustomed to the later titles, but the precedence the title gives to the female characters, and the affinities between them it suggests, are clearly significant in the context of this discussion of representations of femininity.

<sup>66</sup> Farrant's references to *La Muse...* are, like mine, from the Pléiade edition of the *Comédie Humaine* (see IX.1 below). (At the time of writing, only volumes 3 and 4 of *Les Mystères de province* (i.e. *Rosalie, La Justice paternelle (Un drame au bord de la mer)* and *Le Père Canet (Facino Cane)*) were available from the Bibliothèque nationale de France.)

<sup>67</sup> The similarity of Dinah to Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* is striking.

<sup>68</sup> The reference is to Byron's romantic hero.

mes enfants', is mocked by Milaud's reminder of their varied paternity: 'voilà *nos* enfants'' (Farrant 2002: 287). Again, sex and literature coincide, as the question of the paternity of Dinah's children inevitably echoes the story of the authorship of Lousteau's texts, penned, as we know, by his lover.

*Rosalie* recounts the story of another female with both feminine and masculine characteristics, and affinities with the activities of both reading and writing: the 17-year-old Rosalie de Watteville,<sup>69</sup> whose frail and anodyne appearance (she is described as 'une jeune fille frêle, mince, plate, blanche, et de la dernière insignifiance' (PROV: 97)) hides 'un caractère de fer' (PROV: 99). When the mysterious lawyer Albert Savarus arrives in Besançon, Rosalie is fascinated by him and resolves to uncover the mysteries of the enigmatic stranger. Much like Dinah, Rosalie is both a reader and a writer. When she reads *L'Ambitieux par amour*, the story of a man who strives for success in order to be able to marry an Italian princess when she becomes a widow, written by Savarus, Rosalie believes she has discovered the truth about him and, consumed by jealousy, resolves to wrest him from 'cette rivale inconnue' (PROV: 273). She intercepts and reads his correspondence, which further fuels her malevolent projects. When Savarus's personal political ambitions mean that he is unable to work on behalf of her parents, Rosalie resolves to jeopardize his plans for election. She also sends fake letters, supposedly from Savarus, imitating his handwriting, to the Duchesse Francesca d'Argaiolo who, believing that Savarus has betrayed her, marries the duc de Rhétoré.

As in *La Muse*..., the boundaries between literature and life, between reading and writing, are blurred, and this effect is heightened by the story of *L'Ambitieux par amour*, positioned *en abyme* within a main narrative which itself could be read as an

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<sup>69</sup> As Terrasse-Riou points out, the character's name was originally Philomène. The Furne corrigé confirmed the name change to Rosalie.

echo *en abyme* of Balzac's real-life relationship with Madame Hanska. As Farrant explains, 'Balzac hides behind Savarus, Savarus behind Rodolphe, Mme Hanska behind the duchesse d'Argaiolo, herself hidden, in *L'Ambitieux par amour*, by the fictional princesse Gandolphini [...]' (2002: 292). The roles of writer and reader are thus conflated, in that each writer is also a character implicated, on some level, in the diegesis and, as such, subject to an interpretation (or rewriting) at the hands of the reader.

While there are obvious socio-political conclusions to be drawn from the confusion of gender categories in the *mystères urbains*, and from the seduction-oriented depictions of female characters in particular,<sup>70</sup> there are also, I would argue, wider conclusions to be drawn from these texts, relating specifically to our understandings of intertextuality. Gender ambiguity is, of course, by no means the exclusive preserve of the *mystères urbains*. As Prendergast explains, with reference to Praz (1970), androgyny was a commonplace ingredient of the *romantisme frénétique* of the 1830s (1978: 66). Similarly, Palacio refers to 'that amalgamation of the sexes which is one of the chief planks in the decadent platform' (1994: 162). The specificity of gender confusion in the *mystères urbains* would seem to hinge on the centrality of sex to the economy of both city and text. While sex played a pivotal role in social interaction, and made implication in sexual activity a defining feature of both victim and criminal characters, as reflected in the diegesis of the *mystères*, it

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<sup>70</sup> 'Faut-il voir dans cette réduction de la femme à la séduction [...] la marque de la misogynie de nos romans ?' wonders Gauthier, before deciding that, 'il semble raisonnable d'y voir au moins le symptôme d'un refus, parfaitement intégré dans les conventions de l'époque, de penser la femme autrement que par rapport à l'homme et celui d'un malaise profond face au corps féminin et à sa sexualité' (2011: 327). He concludes that female characters in the *mystères* serve as symbols of the social disorder which was the source of such fear in the nineteenth-century city. The fate of female characters, who are either killed off, disappear from the narrative or forced to conform, for example via marriage, invariably ensures preservation of the social status quo: 'Nos mystères urbains se nourrissent du désordre social qui accompagne ces figures mais le résorbent toujours, de façon plus ou moins drastique, dans leurs dernières pages' (2011: 328).

also inflected the writing and reception of the texts, as the authors of popular fiction worked to respond to a growing, and increasingly lascivious, readership.<sup>71</sup>

If my starting point was the notion of the reader as feminine and the writer as masculine, then my analyses have shown that, just as gender categories repeatedly refuse this binary system, so reading and writing cannot be seen as distinct, impermeable processes. The amorphous categories of feminine and masculine, reading and writing in the *mystères* are indicative of the texts' openness to reinscription. If all writers are first readers (Still and Worton 1990: 1, 30), then readers of the *mystères urbains*, especially as 'consumers', find a new agency. The wealth of hypertextual transformations produced in response to Sue's novel must be seen as a direct result of this new, active, 'masculine' readership, no longer the passive object of seduction, but with an increasingly assertive role in a dynamic both sexual and intertextual.

This chapter has considered identity, in its various forms, in the *mystères urbains*, looking in particular at the way in which identity is continually reinscribed in these texts. We have seen how a reappropriation of the hunting cliché anticipates the palimpsestuous premise of the *roman policier*; how secret societies are used to 'rewrite' the underworld, and to raise questions as to the generic identity of the text as well as the identity of its readership; finally, we have seen how representations of sexual identity provide a fertile metaphor for intertextual dynamics. The next chapter will consider geographical and temporal transpositions.

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<sup>71</sup> Robida's 1882 caricature entitled 'La Grande épidémie de pornographie' was a reflection of the perceived affinities between late nineteenth-century literature and dubious sexual conduct.

## V. GEOGRAPHICAL AND TEMPORAL TRANSPOSITIONS

As Genette explains, ‘la diégèse est l’univers spatio-temporel désigné par le récit’ (1982: 419) and, as such, ‘[l]a transformation diégétique [porte] sur les questions où ? et quand ?’ (1982: 457).<sup>1</sup> In this chapter, I will consider a series of texts, our appreciation of which, I will argue, can only be enhanced if they are read as geographical and temporal transpositions of Sue’s *Mystères de Paris*.

In the first section of this chapter (V.1), I will consider the role of the American city in the *mystères urbains*, with specific reference to Lermina’s *Mystères de New York* (1874), whose action takes place in a number of American settings, culminating in New York itself, and Aristide Bruant’s *Bas-Fonds de Paris* (1897), set in both Paris and New York. I will show that, while the Parisian mysteries inaugurated by Sue were transposed to a variety of French and foreign cities, American cities emerged as particularly significant locations. Given that both city and text were subject to a process of Americanization as the nineteenth century progressed, American-set *mystères* take on a fascinating metatextual resonance.

I will then examine two texts characterized by their distinctive temporal setting, namely Zaccone’s *Mystères du vieux Paris*, set in the sixteenth-century capital (V.2), and Lermina’s futuristic *Mystère-ville* (V.3). This ‘dépaysement historique’ (Letourneux 2007) was a means of revitalizing Sue’s text by creating an impression of otherness and exoticism analogous to that achieved by transposing the text to exotic geographical settings. My aim here is not to investigate the accuracy or appropriateness of generic labels such as *roman historique* and *utopie* in evaluating these novels, particularly as these terms are, in themselves, problematic to say the

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<sup>1</sup> On the notion of ‘diegesis’, see also Genette 1972.

least.<sup>2</sup> I aim instead to consider the new light shed by these texts, both on Sue's novel in particular, and on literary production in the nineteenth century in general.

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<sup>2</sup> Bernard is one of a number of critics to note the 'instabilité générique foncière' of the *roman historique* (1996: 71) and decries the '[r]omans psychologiques, romans d'aventures, romans philosophiques, mais non à proprement parler romans historiques' in which history is 'spécieusement thématisée' but 'jamais problématisée' (1996: 17). See also Durand-le-Guern 2006: 252.

## V.1 – AMERICANIZATIONS

An American imaginary of savagery, typified by James Fenimore Cooper's 'frontier fiction',<sup>3</sup> became an important feature of literary descriptions of Paris under the July Monarchy and a favourite metaphor of Balzac.<sup>4</sup> In the *mystères urbains*, wild American forests provided a fitting metaphor for a city space which was both physically and socially hostile, and the *pisteur* (tracker) a similarly appropriate metaphor for the city dweller struggling to 'read' a frequently illegible urban environment.<sup>5</sup>

Explicit reference is made to Cooper in the opening of Sue's *Mystères de Paris*:

Tout le monde a lu les admirables pages dans lesquelles Cooper [...] a tracé les mœurs féroces des sauvages, leur langue pittoresque, poétique, les mille ruses à l'aide desquelles ils fuient ou poursuivent leurs ennemis. [...]

Nous allons essayer de mettre sous les yeux du lecteur quelques épisodes de la vie d'autres barbares aussi en dehors de la civilisation que les sauvages peuplades si bien peintes par Cooper. (MP: 31)<sup>6</sup>

Similarly, Dumas's title *Les Mohicans de Paris* (1854-9) is an obvious *clin d'œil* to Cooper's *Last of the Mohicans* (1826), and one which is pursued throughout the lengthy novel.<sup>7</sup> As we have seen, Boisbogey's *Mystères du nouveau Paris* (1876) also drew extensively on American hunting imagery, making a significant contribution to the rewriting of the hunting cliché and thereby paving the way for the *roman policier*.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> On Cooper, see Messac 1929.

<sup>4</sup> See Gauthier 2011: 116-121.

<sup>5</sup> On the 'legibility' of the city, see II.2 above.

<sup>6</sup> On this opening section of text, see also II.2 and III.1 above.

<sup>7</sup> Though, as Gauthier points out, Dumas's use of the term *Mohicans* is somewhat indiscriminate (2011: 119-120).

<sup>8</sup> See IV.1 above.

But, with the Parisian setting having been explored from a variety of angles, and the hunting metaphor beginning to lose something of its original lustre, it was the American city, rather than its wilder terrain, which would prove an increasingly rich vein in a number of later *mystères*. Interest in the American city was fuelled by a number of significant changes to the urban landscape of the New World: huge immigration occurred as the result of difficult economic circumstances in Europe and was facilitated by technological advances such as steamships and railways (Knight 2012: 136). The resultant urban growth had an inevitable social impact, as Knight remarks, with reference to the ‘communal disintegration’ which affected Philadelphia. In addition to the ‘social and mercantile’ forces of alienation which characterized Paris and London, American cities had to contend with the added complication of racial issues.<sup>9</sup>

Unsurprisingly, the American city fascinated a number of anglophone writers. Dickens’s factual and intensely critical *American Notes* (1842) provoked a number of ripostes (Knight 2012: 158). Of particular note is *The Mysteries and Miseries of New York* by Edward Zane Carroll Judson, writing as ‘Ned Buntline’ (1848) (Knight 2012: 156-181).<sup>10</sup> As Knight acknowledges: ‘Judson’s title avows the impact of Sue, as was true of the substantial number of North American “Mysteries”: by 1860 there had been at least 13 that simply replaced Paris with a transatlantic location’ (2012: 160).

1848 also saw a series of short essays by George Foster, published in the *New York Tribune*, and later collected as *New York in Slices* (1849), then *New York by Gaslight* (1850). As Knight notes, ‘[t]he essays quite often appeared on the

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<sup>9</sup> On race riots, for example, see Jeune 1963: 130 and Knight 2012: 137. On the movement for the abolition of slavery, see Knight 2012: 137.

<sup>10</sup> Knight also mentions three subsequent (less well-written) texts by Judson: *Three Years After* (1849), *The B’hoys of New York* (1849) and *The G’hals of New York* (1850).



paper's front page, a link to the Paris feuilletons [...]’ (2012: 159). Other accounts of New York included George Thompson's *City Crimes* (1849), and James D. McCabe's *Lights and Shadows of New York life, or the Sights and Sensations of the Great City* (1872) (Knight 2012: 159).<sup>11</sup>

Translations into French inevitably followed. In 1855, *Le Panthéon populaire illustré* published Solon Robinson's *Hotcorn Life Scenes in New York, Tales of Slum Life* (1854) as *Les Mystères de New-York* (Jeune 1963: 130). Later, Henri-Émile Chevalier and Th. Laborieu's Sue-inspired *feuilleton*, *Les Trois Babylone : Paris, Londres, New-York* (1864), pointed to a growing interest in the American city among francophone writers although, as Jeune points out, the project does not appear to have been completed.<sup>12</sup> It was in 1874 that *Les Mystères de New-York* by Jules Lermina, writing as William Cobb, was published, both by Sartorius (my references are to this edition), and as a *feuilleton* in the *Petit National* (1874-5) (Lavergne 2008: 20). It is such French accounts of the American city which will be my focus here.

While the urban mysteries of American cities penned by American writers cultivated, much like the mysteries of Sue and his French emulators, a sense of the ‘domestic exotic’, urban mysteries of American cities written by French writers were a rather different prospect. To the increasingly familiar brand of ‘social exoticism’ on offer in the Paris-based mysteries was added an additional, geographical dimension. This was reinforced by the use of supposedly typical American names, where Sue had used French criminal *sobriquets*, and by italicized items of American vernacular, where Sue had included footnotes to explain and critique French criminal

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<sup>11</sup> On the subject of the American urban mystery, Letourneux 2009 refers us to Dennins 1987 and Blumin 1990.

<sup>12</sup> ‘Les auteurs annonçaient en tête du premier volume (*Paris-Babylone*) que le deuxième était sous presse. Nous n'en avons point trouvé trace, pas plus que du troisième qui devait peindre New-York’ (Jeune 1963: 80).

*argot*. The American terms are supposedly characteristic but often amusingly inaccurate and usually relate to business activity:

le « Go ahead » des Américains... la fière et énergique devise qui ordonne d'aller toujours de l'avant... (BAS: 887)

[Johnson] s'arrêta, et prenant la main au poète [Yoke], la secoua avec un vigoureux *shake hand* [...]. (NYORK: 363)

Un solide *shake-hand* scella le pacte et l'union de ces deux rudes hommes [Jean Robin and Patrice Guerry] devint indissoluble. (BAS: 200)

The sense of geographical exoticism was underlined further by comparisons between French and American cities, as was the case with Bruant's *Bas-Fonds de Paris*, whose action alternates between New York and the French capital.<sup>13</sup>

Geographical distance is also underlined in these texts by what Letourneux (2007) calls 'la distance par la fiction'.<sup>14</sup> The fact was that the only experience most French authors and playwrights had of America was through literature, as Jeune explains:

Ce que la plupart des Français savaient ou croyaient savoir des mœurs américaines, ils l'avaient appris par l'imprimé et les spectacles. A n'en pas douter, les œuvres littéraires ont joué un rôle intermédiaire en substituant une image vivante et présente au lointain personnage de chair et d'os. (1963: 468-9)<sup>15</sup>

The same was certainly true of Lermina, whose accounts of America were based on his readings of English and American literature (Jeune 1963: 130). Although Brunetière, along with Bourget, was one of a number of journalists and critics who

<sup>13</sup> Hippolyte Taine had already demonstrated the potential of such comparative approaches, in his account of Paris seen through the eyes of an American, *Notes sur Paris. Vie et opinions de M. Frédéric-Thomas Graindorge* (1867).

<sup>14</sup> I have suggested the term 'intertextual exotic' (see IV.1 above).

<sup>15</sup> See also Jeune 1963: 463 and 465-6.

did publish accounts of their real journeys to America,<sup>16</sup> his equation of the tumult of American life, and the spectacular failures and recoveries of billionaires, to the interminable *péripéties* of the *roman-feuilleton* is telling:

Dans la chronique de la vie d'outre-mer, leurs pertes ou leurs gains intéressent et passionnent l'opinion publique à l'égal d'un roman-feuilleton, mais d'un roman-feuilleton qui ne finirait point, qui n'aurait point de « dénouement », qui recommencerait toujours, à l'instar de ceux du vieux Dumas. On croyait qu'Aramis et Porthos étaient morts, on les avait enterrés, et point du tout, voici que du fond de leur tombe ils se relèvent, et on s'aperçoit qu'en les tuant, le romancier, par des moyens qu'il n'avait pas dit, avait eu l'art de leur conserver une chance de vie. On s'émerveille et on applaudit. Pareillement les milliardaires. Ils étaient engagés dans deux, trois, quatre, dix entreprises gigantesques, et elles s'effondrent ! mais il y en avait une onzième, qu'on ne connaissait point, et, du milieu de la ruine des autres, la voici, tout d'un coup, qui s'élève, et elle est la plus fructueuse ! Comment l'imagination populaire en voudrait-elle aux hommes qui lui ont procuré le plaisir de semblables surprises ? (Brunetière 1900: 158-9)

While I have remarked the same tendency in depictions of Paris,<sup>17</sup> American cities, by dint of their geographical inaccessibility for the French writer, were even more emphatically 'already-written'. This inherent hypertextuality goes some way toward explaining the importance of these texts to this study.

I wish to contend, then, that the American-set *mystères* have a significance which transcends their status as apparently superficial diegetic transpositions, and that the American city provided an especially appropriate and fertile subject matter for an increasingly mature, self-conscious genre. To illustrate my argument, I will consider: the ways in which these texts reinvent Sue's notion of the *bas-fonds*; the particular aptness of the city-text analogy in the case of the American city and the popular text; the various manifestations of excess in the American city and depictions of it, which reflect the *surenchère* increasingly characteristic of the

<sup>16</sup> See Hamon and Viboud 2008: 64.

<sup>17</sup> On Paris as 'already-written', see II.3 above.

*mystères urbains*; and the tendency towards humour in literary depictions of America, which highlights a similar tendency towards wry, self-conscious humour in the *mystères urbains*.

### **Reinventing the *bas-fonds***

It is certainly easy to see how critics of the *mystères*, cynical of the texts' ability to transfer their action to a variety of geographical and temporal settings, and the clear commercial potential this had, might dismiss these American versions of the *mystères* as superficial diegetic transpositions. Barely disguised similarities to Sue's text abound. The melodramatic motif of the lost child, introduced in *Les Mystères de Paris* via the characters of Fleur-de-Marie and François Germain, finds New York counterparts in brothers Michaël and Jemmy, orphaned and separated from sister Netty. Sue's cabaret du Lapin-Blanc is replaced by Lermina's *Old-Flag*, an almost identically raucous drinking establishment, distinguished only by the fact that the imposing landlady serves whiskey rather than *eau-de-vie*. And Lermina's descriptions of New York, minus the topographic detail identifying specific streets and buildings, evoke a dark, claustrophobic, labyrinthine city space strikingly similar to that described by Sue, as the following quotations show:

Quittant Broadway, dépassant l'hôtel de ville (*City Hall*), traversant Pearl Street, engageons-nous dans le dédale de rues étroites et sombres qui rayonnent autour de ce centre sinistre qui a nom : les Tombes. (NYORK: 2)<sup>18</sup>

la Cité, dédale de rues obscures, étroites, tortueuses, qui s'étend depuis le Palais de Justice jusqu'à Notre-Dame. (MP: 32)

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<sup>18</sup> The factual basis of this description is questionable. See, for example, Wharton's account of 1870s New York in *The Age of Innocence*. When Newland Archer suggests that Countess Olenska, who has returned from Europe following her failed marriage, may need help in negotiating the city, she expresses surprise, given its geographical simplicity: 'Is New York such a labyrinth? I thought it so straight up and down – like Fifth Avenue. And with all the cross streets numbered! [...] If you knew how I like it just for *that* – the straight-up-and-downness, and the big honest labels on everything!' (Wharton 1999 [1920]: 49).

But a closer inspection of Lermina's text, and in particular of his descriptions of cities other than New York, suggest a rather more complex relationship with Sue's urban mystery archetype. In fact, we are dealing with a fundamentally different conception of the city, with inevitable consequences for our identification and understanding of the mysteries particular to that urban space. While the European city, and especially post-Haussmannization Paris, is traditionally presented as a gradual, sedimentary accretion of historical layers, whose mysteries are revealed via a process of excavation, its American equivalent is a very different prospect.<sup>19</sup> As Lermina explains, evoking Cherry Creek, close to Denver, and Franklin, Pennsylvania, 'la ville du pétrole' (NYORK: 326), American settlements grow up around sites where natural resources, such as gold or oil, have been discovered, bringing with them waves of savage criminality:

Depuis la découverte de la Source d'or, la population avait plus que décuplé ; toutes choses nécessaires à la vie avaient atteint des prix tellement exorbitants que l'or valait en quelque sorte moins que le cuivre. C'était par dizaines, par centaines de dollars qu'il fallait payer toute marchandise, si bien que la misère s'abattait sur cette population, composée de toute la lie de la populace, des déclassés et des bandits. Chaque jour, c'étaient des vols ou des meurtres. Les rixes étaient continuelles, et il était rare que le soleil se couchât sans avoir éclairé une scène de sauvagerie. (NYORK: 288)

Both *l'or* and *le pétrole* can be read as geological metaphors of mysteries awaiting discovery, and yet the reader's historical proximity to these discoveries (Lermina's account of a discovery of gold and subsequent settlement (NYORK: 167-8), is dated to 1858, not even twenty years prior to the publication of his text), and to the various urban developments they bring, obliges us to reconsider Sue's conception of the city.

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<sup>19</sup> According to Williams, in contrast to treatments of the same theme in American literature, '[t]he theme of an underworld society in British and French literature is linked to the recurrent event of excavation, which reshaped England and the Continent during the nineteenth century' (2008: 184).

Lack of historical depth in the American city invalidates the excavational project and the notion of the *bas-fonds* as we know it. As a result, criminality is transposed, paradoxically, to the upper reaches of society, a shift prefigured by Lermina's descriptions of the Far West, where the dizzy heights of mountain ranges are just as intriguing as the uncharted depths of the gorges beneath them, and the proximity of the two geographical extremes is telling (Appendix VIII.5.1).<sup>20</sup>

In Lermina's New York, sites such as the *Alm House*, *Soup-House* and Cinq Points are characterized by misery, illness and destitution (in one scene we see Dan Yoke taking his friend Edwards Longsword on a tour of these areas to put his own troubles in perspective),<sup>21</sup> but there is little mention of criminality in these places. Crime in Lermina's city is rather to be found in its upper echelons, in the spheres of finance and, to a certain extent, politics, which is controlled by money anyway.<sup>22</sup> Adams Macy, a corrupt banker running an unscrupulous campaign to be named governor of New York, is the central criminal figure. Subsidiary villains are characterized by the same merciless capitalism, while innocents are defined, conversely, by their ignorance of commercial imperatives. When Antonia Widman is forced into marriage with Warton, an associate of Macy, despite being in love with Edwards Longsword, we are told: 'Cette jeune fille ignorait, en réalité, les plus

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<sup>20</sup> On various spatial and moral inversions in the *mystères*, see also IV.2, V.3 and VI.3. On the notion of inverted (extra-diegetic) margins, see III.

<sup>21</sup> Note that Judson's *Mysteries* includes a very similar episode, 'the major set-piece in chapter 10 when Frank takes Precise to Five Points' (Knight 2012: 179): 'Frank shows Precise the appalling slums of the Lower East Side around Five Points, and especially the sordid, dangerous "Old Brewery" [...], a lodging house for over a thousand desperate people' (Knight 2012: 164).

<sup>22</sup> Knight notes a very similar depiction of 'the nature and misdirection of the highest echelons of power in the American city' in George Lippard's *The Quaker City* (1844-5), enumerating: 'The arrogant corruption of the wealthy Lorrimer, the apparent connivance of Arlington (who is in the import business), the degraded support of the "pursy" Colonel Mutchins, hanger-on of wealth and power, and the small Sylvester J. Petriken, corrupt newspaper editor' (2012: 140). Jeune notes the same preoccupation with high-end crime in Emile Desbeaux's 1875 *Le Mystère de Westfield*: 'Le cadre est le même [que celui de Lermina]: New-York. Le thème aussi : il s'agit des horribles forfaits d'une association de bandits se recrutant dans la haute société. Le chef, au pouvoir magnétique est un des plus riches banquiers de New-York. Le roman s'applique surtout à détailler des crimes d'un raffinement monstrueux' (1963: 130-1).

élémentaires principes du commerce. Warton considérait son contrat de mariage comme un chèque payable à présentation...' (NYORK: 70).

Lermina's description of the return of Yoke and Longsword to 'civilization', after their 'hellish' tour of Cinq Points, is thus somewhat ironic, given that the simplistic polarities of good and bad, high and low, on which it hinges have, in fact, been called into question:

Le jour se levait. La pluie avait cessé.  
 Les deux hommes se dirigèrent vers la ville civilisée.  
 On pouvait dire d'eux ce que murmuraient les enfants sur le passage  
 d'Alighieri...  
 Ils revenaient de l'enfer... (NYORK: 105)

Pike, in *Metropolis on the Styx: The Underworlds of Modern Urban Culture, 1800-2001* (2007: 27) remarks a very similar shift in Thomas Wallace Knox's *Underground; or, Life below the Surface* (1873), from a material underground (in Knox's text, that of mining) to the metaphorical underground of capitalism:

Men devote time, and patience, and study to the acquisition of wealth by measures that are as far removed from the light of honesty as the tunnel the miner drives beneath the mountain is removed from the light of the sun [...] A great city, in its moral or immoral life, is cut and seamed with subterranean excavations more extensive than those of the richest coal-fields of England or Belgium. Wall Street is a mining centre far greater than the whole of Pennsylvania, and to one who knows it intimately it reveals daily more shafts and tunnels than can be found in Nevada or Colorado. (Knox 1873: 33-4)

Lermina's characters make a number of playful references to this reinvention of the underground and the role reversal it implies, as, for example, when Trip, Mop and Bam discuss their own criminal projects as though they were part of a patriotic crusade in the name of propriety against the corrupt business world (Appendix VIII.5.2). Clump, the Fagin-like figure who takes in Michaël and Jemmy Hardwin on their arrival in New York and tries to coerce them into crime, draws a similarly

humorous parallel between the physical confinement of the office life to which the young brothers aspire and his own experience of incarceration in prison (Appendix VIII.5.3).

The blurring of the high-low dialectic is obviously of particular significance in these American-set *mystères*, as we also see it in a key episode of *Les Bas-Fonds de Paris*, in which criminal Raquedalle visits ‘Boomerang et Cowland’, a private detective agency, situated ‘bougrement haut !’ (BAS: 519), on the seventeenth floor of a grandiose, twenty-storey New York building. The huge edifice, which requires a whole team of concierges, is obviously meant to represent the city in microcosm, as we are told that ‘cette maison [...] a, à elle seule, autant d’habitants qu’une petite cité’ (BAS: 519). Raquedalle is conveyed to the seventeenth floor by means of an impressive ticketed lift, which leaves every five minutes. But ‘[la] hauteur respectable’ of the building (BAS: 518) is deceptive, as becomes clear in Bruant’s description of the agency’s activities (Appendix VIII.5.4).

The professionalization of criminal activity thus goes hand in hand with the corruption of the forces of law and order. This confusion of ‘high and ‘low’ was, of course, by no means original. The figure of the criminal-turned-detective was popularized by Vidocq’s *Mémoires* (1828-9) and cultivated in the *mystères urbains*. Hobbs discusses the idea of the detective as the criminal’s alter ego, pointing out Rodolphe’s ironic resort to the same disguise and *argot* as the criminals he pits himself against (1998: 83).<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Letourneux notes a similarly ironic blurring in Priollet: ‘que les aristocrates soient d’anciens bagnards et les orphelins se révèlent d’extraction noble trouve son équivalence spatiale dans les passages secrets qui mènent des Hôtels particuliers aux tapis francs, ce que synthétise le titre oxymoronique de la série de Marcel Priollet, *Les Bas-fonds du grand monde*’ (2009).



We have already noted Lavergne's acknowledgment of a shift up and away from the literal, physical *bas-fonds* in the later Parisian mysteries.<sup>24</sup> The American city, however, seems especially conducive to this type of confusion. The high buildings evoked by Bruant and the sophisticated technology used to navigate them appear to exaggerate the high/low dialectic<sup>25</sup> and yet the physical spaces of the American city serve to confuse, rather than clearly articulate, social divisions, as Knight explains with reference to Judson:

Judson's New York of 1848 is not represented as a federation of separate zones with substantial journeys to be made between them, socially and physically, as in Sue and Reynolds. [...] it is a set of adjoining zones where poor and rich cross paths with some risk to each other: the city's topography enacts a mix of democracy and conflict that is essentially American. (2012: 174-5)

And social divisions are unclear in any case, in that the socially mobile, self-made man, so celebrated by American, capitalist society, often has an unsavoury criminal past:

La société américaine lui offrait [à Lermina] des facilités : c'est une société sans classes, le banquier y coudoie plus facilement l'ouvrier qu'en Europe, et les déguisements des héros de Sue pour leur plongée dans la pègre ne s'imposaient plus. Mieux que cela : le banquier était, lui-même un ancien ouvrier, voire un vagabond. (Jeune 1963: 130)

Hence Lermina's description of 'ce foyer horrible où il n'y a plus ni castes, ni classes, ni degrés, où tout se passe sous le même niveau de honte et de perversité...' (NYORK: 97-8).

<sup>24</sup> See quotation p. 76 (Lavergne 2009: 191-2).

<sup>25</sup> Lifts and high buildings reinforce what Letourneux (2009) describes as 'cette géographie verticale de la ville, opposant surface et profondeur, dont Pike [2007] a montré qu'elle revenait aussi à confronter la célébration de la modernité aux peurs inconscientes symbolisées par les souterrains'. On the importance of 'the skyscraper/subway pairing of New York' in the twentieth century, see Pike 2005: 286.

We are inevitably reminded of the poststructuralist understanding of the palimpsest, according to which meaning is not hidden (in a textual underworld), but is rather a surface-level phenomenon.<sup>26</sup> Characters such as Lermina's Mary Macy seem to personify the blurring of Manichean categories of good and bad, high and low, and thereby mirror the complexity and ambiguity of the palimpsest. Despite her staunch opposition to her father and the corruption he represents, the similarity of her Christian name to the surname she has inherited from him is striking and, we are told, she has resorted to the same morally dubious tactics (albeit to different ends):

Comment se trouvait-elle à New-York ? comment n'était-elle pas en route pour l'Europe ?

Est-ce que l'argent n'est pas tout-puissant ? Son père le lui avait appris, et la leçon n'avait pas été perdue...

Une fois en mer, elle avait corrompu le capitaine, qui avait stoppé à Terre-Neuve et l'avait déposée à terre... alors elle était revenue à New-York. (NYORK: 370)

The American-set *mystères*, then, exemplify a real turning point in the mystery genre, after which the *mystères* would be as much about the identification of mysterious, criminal elements (no longer conveniently confined to the urban underbelly) as about solving the mystery or crime itself, and this diegetic change is particularly significant in that it reflects a similar hermeneutic shift.

### **The city as text**

The extension of the notion of criminality, to encompass high-end as well as lower-class crime (we could refer to a democratization of crime, for want of a better term), is indicative of the fundamental ambiguity of the quintessentially American notion of

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<sup>26</sup> See II.3 above.

democracy. This is also a key way in which the American city can be said to mirror the text, whose democratization was met with a similar ambivalence.

While the notion of democracy had a number of obviously positive associations, with ideals of equality, liberty and modernity, American democracy and utilitarianism had an equally negative flipside.<sup>27</sup> In 'L'âme américaine' (1900), Brunetière criticized the uniformity of American life:

M. James Bryce fait observer, dans un chapitre spécial de son admirable ouvrage *American Commonwealth*, que toutes les villes américaines se ressemblent, et « qu'on trouve, dit-il, dans l'une à peu près absolument ce que l'on trouve dans l'autre ». (Brunetière 1900: 131-2)<sup>28</sup>

Paris, he warned, was being subjected to a damaging Americanization: 'Nos nouveaux boulevards sont des boulevards américains' (133).

The democratization of culture was causing similar consternation within the literary establishment, and this was voiced by a number of writers. Of Flaubert, Jeune notes that 'le mot « américain » dans sa correspondance signifie à la fois « utilitaire, laid et barbare »' (1963: 11); in *À rebours* (1884), Huysmans criticized the Americanization of French society;<sup>29</sup> poet Jules Laforgue also bemoaned 'l'image américaine': a levelling off, banalization and vulgarization of the arts. The

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<sup>27</sup> Hamon and Viboud sum this ambiguity up particularly well: 'Les États-Unis possèdent une image assez ambivalente dans la littérature de l'époque. Tantôt ils incarnent le pays de la liberté, de la modernité, de la libre entreprise, et de nombreux personnages y font un séjour ou rêvent de s'y installer pour fuir quelque chose ou faire fortune (voir la première *Éducation sentimentale* de Flaubert), tantôt ils incarnent (depuis Stendhal [*La Chartreuse de Parme*]) le côté nivelant de la démocratie et sont présentés comme un pays matérialiste, sans culture, pays de Barnum et du dieu dollar' (2008: 63).

<sup>28</sup> Brunetière saw this uniformity as the result of a lack of history: 'N'est-ce pas tout simplement qu'elles sont toutes assez récentes ? Qu'est-ce que deux cent cinquante ans dans la vie d'une ville ? Marseille a deux mille six cents ans ; Lyon et Paris en ont tantôt deux mille : il y a en Amérique des villes de 300 000 âmes, Buffalo par exemple, qui ne sont pas encore vieilles d'un siècle ! Le temps seul, aux villes comme aux hommes, donne une physionomie' (1900: 132).

<sup>29</sup> In his 1903 preface to the novel, Huysmans explains the evolution of the character of des Esseintes thus: 'je me figurais un monsieur Folantin [of *À Vau-l'eau*], plus lettré, plus raffiné, plus riche et qui a découvert, dans l'artifice, un dérivatif au dégoût que lui inspirent les tracas de la vie et les mœurs américaines de son temps' (1983: 55).

democratization of culture was tantamount to aesthetic blandness and superficiality.<sup>30</sup>

Bruant's text seems acutely conscious of the negative discourse surrounding America and appears to defuse and parody this, by drawing on the popular analogy between city and text. Bruant's main character is a Frenchman who has made his fortune as an architect in America and whose plan to dismantle his palatial New York residence and reconstruct it brick by brick on the Champs-Élysées<sup>31</sup> could be likened to the mechanical diegetic transpositions effected by Sue's emulators and many other adepts of popular fiction (Appendix VIII.5.5). Lermina's description of the rapid and formulaic construction of Black-Hawk, whose component parts are slotted into place like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, could also be applied to text as well as city (Appendix VIII.5.6).

Jean Robin<sup>32</sup> is a sympathetic mix of American ambition and European refinement, and if his architectural endeavours are indeed to be read as metaphors of the mechanical nature of popular fiction, then their portrayal as pioneering technological feats perhaps gives the reader food for thought. Bruant and Lermina do not expect the reader to revise his judgements as to the value of popular texts, but these city(-text) descriptions are definitely a wink of complicity to the reader, who is invited to acknowledge how these texts work and thereby reaffirm his willingness to participate in the game. The reference to 'un jeu de patience' is, indeed, significant.

In a similar way, the American city depicted by Lermina has many of the same qualities which characterize the *mystères urbains* genre itself, and particularly

<sup>30</sup> See Hamon 2001: 27-8, 300, 303 and 305-6.

<sup>31</sup> Describing the Elysian Fields of Hoboken, New Jersey, Lermina evokes a similar 'transposition' (albeit in name only): '[...] Hoboken est un lieu privilégié [...], les paysages qu'on découvre des rives du fleuve sont si pittoresques et saisissent si fortement l'imagination, qu'on a désigné ce lieu par un surnom significatif : les Champs-Élysées...' (NYORK: 316)

<sup>32</sup> Interestingly, his name is very similar to that of Jean Robert, the aspiring writer in Dumas's *Mohicans de Paris*.

at this stage of its development. One good example is the lack of a political dimension to Lermina's New York. Even though Macy is running for governor of New York, and the end of the novel sees President Andrew Johnson intervene in person to right Macy's wrongs, genuine political content is conspicuous by its absence, with commercial imperatives always prevailing. Johnson's punishment of Macy consists in him paying off his victims and giving up his financial assets:

Combien possédais-tu quand tu es arrivé à New-York après le meurtre des frères Hardwin ?

[...]

– Cent mille dollars, as-tu dit ? Eh bien, donne-moi un chèque de pareille somme...

[...]

– Maintenant, ce n'est pas tout... tu vas céder ta maison de banque, toutes les opérations dans lesquelles tu as un intérêt, à Smith Henderson... qui fera la liquidation, lentement et sûrement, de telle sorte que les intérêts de tous soient aussi complètement sauvegardés qu'il sera possible...

(NYORK: 368)

According to Jeune, this is typical of French depictions of America:

Les hommes politiques qui attirent souvent les regards des voyageurs ne se retrouvent guère chez nos auteurs, exception faite pour quelques peintures lourdement satiriques. [...] D'ailleurs politiciens [...] sont à leur manière des « hommes d'affaires » et rejoignent ainsi le type principal, le seul qui intéresse vraiment les Français. (1963: 459)

But the lack of a political dimension in *Les Mystères de New-York* is particularly significant in that it mirrors the tendency, in the later *mystères urbains*, for political discourse to give way to commercially tried-and-tested stereotype:

le discours politique paraît bien vite s'étioler au profit d'un sensationnalisme qui était probablement le premier projet de Sue, avant que celui-ci ne convertisse son projet *dandy* en vision politique. La dimension politique du projet de Sue ne s'est en effet guère prolongée chez la plupart de ses successeurs [...]. Si Paul Féval témoigne encore de velléités politiques, chez Ponson du Terrail, déjà, elles ne sont plus que superficielles, et leurs successeurs, Gustave Aimard ou Fortuné du Boisgobey, se contentent de

reprendre des stéréotypes déjà éprouvés, ne gardant du discours sur la société qu'une série de phrases toutes faites à la généralité vide de contenu. (Letourneux 2007)

The American city could thus be said to exemplify traits which are to be found in the *mystères urbains* as a whole.

### **‘[U]ne surenchère de la violence et du sensationnalisme’**

Perhaps the most striking way in which the American city mirrors the preoccupations of the popular text is in its propensity for exaggeration. As Letourneux explains, the *mystères urbains* were concerned with revealing the disorder of the city, but also restoring a sense of order and control via their conventional, formulaic treatment of that revelation. A set of reassuringly familiar stereotypes created ‘une forme maîtrisable du désordre réel’ (2007). And yet, if the *mystères* were to retain their appeal, the reader’s impression of control had to be continually challenged, by ever-more exaggerated and excessive strains of violence and sensationalism:

pour pouvoir continuer de formuler – et donc d’exorciser – le chaos de la ville réelle, la mise en ordre stéréotypique et fictive doit se doubler d’une surenchère de la violence et du sensationnalisme : pour donner l’impression du désordre malgré ce travail de cadrage, on lui donne la forme d’une cruauté toujours plus délirante. D’Eugène Sue à Paul Féval et Ponson du Terrail, de Paul Féval à Gustave Aimard, de Gustave Aimard à Gaston Leroux, Léon Sazie et Marcel Allain, c’est une série de glissements qui se produisent dans la représentation de la ville vers un romanesque de plus en plus débridé et excentrique. [...] chaque nouvelle figuration doit surenchérir dans le sensationnel pour séduire le lecteur et le convaincre encore une fois de jouer le jeu de la révélation d’un monde monstrueux qui se cacherait derrière la ville bien connue. (Letourneux 2007)

The remarkable scale and speed of change in the nineteenth-century American city undoubtedly mirrored the *surenchère* of the text on many levels. Population growth

in nineteenth-century New York was exponential and urban development, in response to this, extremely rapid. As Knight puts it:

[New York] was growing enormously, from 300,000 people in 1840 to at least half a million in 1850. The streets were surging north up the island of Manhattan: in 1820, 10th was the farthest you could go; in 1860, plans were laid for development beyond 155th street. The most detailed early account of the city says New York was in this time “upon a course of expansion in population, wealth, and commerce that has scarcely been equalled by any other city before or since.” (2012: 157)<sup>33</sup>

Jeune agrees that ‘aucun pays au monde ne s’était transformé plus rapidement que ne le firent les Etats-Unis entre 1860 et 1914’ (1963: 458). Excess became a key feature of literary depictions of America, and was expressed in quantitative terms with, perhaps most notably, the rich businessman a recurrent figure.<sup>34</sup> It was also a qualitative phenomenon, with America frequently portrayed as ‘le continent du bizarre, de l’extraordinaire’ (Jeune 1963: 462), and characterized by ‘l’admiration pour tout ce qui est voyant : productions jamais égalées, proportions jamais atteintes, « réclames » assourdissantes, grosses mystifications’ (Jeune 1963: 463). ‘Mystery’, in these American versions, is often synonymous with ‘mystification’, and references to Barnum, the famous circus impresario, renowned for his elaborate mystifications, are frequent (Appendix VIII.5.7). Barnum and his commercially-motivated trickery are arguably as much a reflection of the text itself as of the city. His mystifications were aided by ‘l’instinct des moyens propres à frapper les masses’ (Larousse 1866-78), an instinct certainly shared by the authors and editors of the *mystères*. Similarly, his 1858 conference on *The Art of Money Getting*, which featured a presentation

<sup>33</sup> Knight’s quotation is from Phelps Stokes (1918, vol. 3: 633).

<sup>34</sup> As Jeune points out, richness was not only a defining quality, but also, appropriately, subject to continual exaggeration itself: ‘ces hommes sont toujours extrêmement riches ; c’est peut-être le trait le plus constant du type, c’est même dans beaucoup de vaudevilles ou de romans populaires la seule justification du personnage : millionnaire de 1860 ou milliardaire de 1900’ (1963: 459).

entitled *Advertise your business* (Dousteyssier-Khoze 2012: 150) showcased a commercial astuteness much like that shaping popular fiction at the time.

Exaggeration, already integral to the American stereotype, is cultivated even further in my corpus texts. A good example of this is Sue's description of 'le Temple' in *Les Mystères de Paris* (MP: 477-84) and Lermina's hyperbolic description of a very similar New York bazaar. Although Rodolphe is certainly struck by 'l'aspect singulier de cet énorme bazar [...] un vaste bâtiment circulaire, colossale rotonde entourée d'une galerie à arcades' (MP: 477), his reaction is considerably more understated than that of Lermina's characters:

– Au coin de Broadway et de Walker Street...

C'est un vrai bazar, et dans des proportions que l'Europe ne connaît pas. Cinq étages, amoncellement de jaquettes, cataracte de pantalons, montagne de chapeaux, ruissellement de chemises, mine noire de souliers à clous énormes...

[...]

A la porte, d'immenses écriteaux.

[...]

Inouï ! incroyable ! fabuleux ! gigantesque opération ! La merveille du monde ! *The Wonder of the World* ! (NYORK: 49)

Again, this is a description of the text as much as it is of the city. While such advertising signs and posters were certainly a reality in *fin-de-siècle* Paris,<sup>35</sup> their role here is also to underline the increasing resort of the *mystères* themselves to hyperbole and exaggeration.

As well as these unsubtle attempts to outdo Sue, the texts are also full of the sort of scientific and technological detail typical of the *surenchère* described by Letourneux, who remarks:

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<sup>35</sup> On the role of Jules Chéret's posters in 'l'américanisation du roman fin de siècle', see Dousteyssier-Khoze 2012.



la tendance des œuvres plus tardives à introduire toujours davantage de modernité ou de cosmopolitisme dans leurs intrigue [*sic*], comme si ce n'était pas la logique de la fiction qui entraînait le processus de surenchère, mais la réalité elle-même, toujours plus cosmopolite et technologique : aux Peaux-Rouges et aux Thugs, vont bientôt succéder les sous-sols merveilleux imaginés par Gaston Leroux sous l'opéra, les machines à assassiner, les crimes excentriques de Zigomar, et les monstruosité de Fantômas qui ne sont en définitive qu'un moyen de redonner par la surenchère une séduction aux mécanismes stéréotypiques. (2007)<sup>36</sup>

To give just a few examples, effusive references to the use of 'cablegramme', 'vapeur', 'électricité' and 'photographie' in the American city abound in Bruant's *Bas-Fonds*.<sup>37</sup> Comparisons with an old-fashioned Europe reinforce the point (Appendix VIII.5.7).

The reference to Edison, for those reading *Les Bas-Fonds* when it was first published, would arguably have conjured up the character in Villiers de L'Isle-Adam's fantastic *L'Ève future* (1886),<sup>38</sup> rather than the real scientist. Bruant seems actually to be highlighting the superficiality of his references to science and technology, and thereby acknowledging his resort to the *surenchère* described by Letourneux.

Similarly exaggerated claims are to be found in *Les Mystères de New-York*. Assertions of realism are made a little too emphatically, and the American setting invoked, conveniently, to explain away unlikely scenarios. For example, when the sane but recalcitrant Mary Macy is about to be forcibly imprisoned in an asylum, according to her father's instructions, we are assured that 'la scène qui va suivre, si effrayante, si invraisemblable qu'elle paraisse, est vraie, absolument vraie... Ceci peut arriver, ceci arrive en Amérique...' (NYORK: 274). As in Bruant, impressive references are made to science, such as the full-page footnote explaining how

<sup>36</sup> As Letourneux goes on to explain, this would be an integral part of the twentieth-century *roman d'espionnage*.

<sup>37</sup> See, for example, BAS: 315

<sup>38</sup> See Hamon and Viboud 2008: 64.

Colosse uses electricity to blow up the Pierre d'Enfer mountain, thus foiling Macy's attempt to set fire to the Franklin oil well (NYORK: 342-3) (Figure 5). But again, as in Bruant, literature is ultimately a more potent force than science. In describing Colosse, Lermina abandons attempts at scientific classification in favour of a series of intertextual references: 'A quelle race pouvait bien appartenir cet être singulier ? [...] à ce monde fantaisiste dont l'imagination de Swift a peuplé Lilliput ou que Hoffmann a placé sur le fauteuil ministériel avec le prince Cinabre' (NYORK: 34-5). And it is writer Dan Yoke who ultimately performs a more impressive feat than Colosse, by producing a written account of the events of the novel: 'j'ai tout reconstitué [...] Savez-vous ce que sont ces papiers ? C'est la preuve du crime de Macy, c'est la fortune des Hardwin restituée à Netty et à ses frères. C'est la justice réhabilitée, car c'est la réparation !' (NYORK: 350).<sup>39</sup> Colosse acknowledges the pre-eminence of literature over science, declaring: 'Vous avez fait plus encore que moi-même !' (NYORK: 350). Once again, the preoccupations of the *mystères urbains* as a whole are exemplified in the American city.

### **'Ces Américains, tout de même !'**

Another way in which these representations of the American city could be said to mirror the text is in their proclivity for humour. As Jeune puts it:

l'opposition manichéenne – et traditionnelle – de deux tendances, l'une favorable, l'autre défavorable à l'Amérique, ne rend nullement compte de toute la réalité. Une troisième tradition existe, pour laquelle l'Américain est essentiellement un personnage qui provoque le sourire ou excite le rire. Cette veine humoristique ou bouffonne est même probablement la plus importante. [...] la plupart des ouvrages favorables se conforment également à cette règle : l'admiration qu'on exige de nous n'exclut jamais un certain sourire où la bienveillance et l'ironie se mêlent. Avec un clin d'œil complice à son

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<sup>39</sup> While Lermina compares Yoke to Balzac (NYORK: 91), for Jeune the character is clearly modelled on Poe (1963: 130). Yoke must also, inevitably, be seen as an avatar of Lermina himself.

lecteur l'auteur semble chuchoter : « Ces Américains, tout de même ! » (1963: 463)

In Bruant's *Bas-Fonds*, this humour is signposted in the form of a reference to Flaubert's *Dictionnaire des idées reçues*. This reference, situated at a critical point in the novel, where the action switches from Paris to New York, is indicative of the satire which will be integral to Bruant's depiction of America (Appendix VIII.5.8).

The humour is perhaps less subtle, but equally revealing, in *Les Mystères de New-York*. Many of Lermina's characters, for example, are vaudeville villains, as we see in the scene in which Trip and Mop receive a letter from Bam:

Doggy tient la lettre entre ses doigts gras et la lève en l'air, comme on fait d'un morceau de sucre avec lequel on tamente un roquet...

– Ouvre ça, dit Trip en passant la lettre à Mop.

C'est avec respect que Mop déchire l'enveloppe. Quelque chose tombe à terre...

– Hein ? s'écrie Doggy.

– Un billet de banque !!!

Et, se baissant tous trois pour le ramasser, ils se cognent si violemment la tête que tous trois reculèrent. (NYORK: 47-8)

This kind of slapstick comedy is much less common in Sue,<sup>40</sup> but clearly evokes the plethora of theatrical and parodic transformations produced in response to *Les Mystères de Paris*.<sup>41</sup> The humour is rather more sophisticated in the final lines of the novel, where the Trip and Mop double act show an amusing awareness of how the *bas-fonds* have been reinvented in the novel, and make the simultaneous suggestion, in a dialogue easy to imagine enacted on stage, and timed to comic perfection, to make the move from the criminal world into that of the police:

– Trip !

– Mop !

<sup>40</sup> One of the few examples of physical comedy is when Madame Pipelet pours a pan of soup over the men who have come to arrest her destitute tenant Morel. On this episode, see also VI.3 below.

<sup>41</sup> See VI.2 and VI.3 below.

- J’ai une idée !
  - J’allais te faire une proposition.
  - Parle le premier.
  - Non, toi d’abord !
  - Eh bien, parlons ensemble.
- Et les deux amis prononcèrent ces paroles mémorables :
- Si nous entrions dans la police ? (NYORK: 371-2)

The metalepsis at work here, in the form of a reference to the reinvention of the *bas-fonds*, is implicit, but indisputable. We are left with the distinct impression that the characters are fully aware of, and complicit in, the evolution of their own role.

In this section, I have considered the specificity of American-set *mystères*. I have shown that the reinvention of the *bas-fonds* played out in their diegesis is symptomatic of a more sophisticated, less Manichean approach to mystery, and mirrors a similar approach to the mysteries of the text which, increasingly, are to be painstakingly unravelled on the surface level rather than unearthed from beneath it. The ambiguity of democracy in the American city echoes concerns within the literary establishment regarding the democratization of literature. The excess and exaggeration traditionally held to be characteristic of the American city reflect the increasing resort to *surenchère* to revitalize the *mystères*. An often comical take on American life reflects the humorous and self-reflexive tendency of the *mystères*. To conclude, if, as already suggested, a fruitful analogy can be drawn between city and text in the *mystères urbains*, then it is in the American-set *mystères* that this analogy is at its most powerful, because the preoccupations of the American city repeatedly mirror those of the popular text. The next two sections of this chapter will be devoted to temporal transpositions.

## V.2 – THE PAST IS A FOREIGN CITY: HISTORICIZATION

The nineteenth century was, according to Durand-Le Guern, ‘le siècle de l’histoire’ (2000: 82), a century both obsessed with bygone eras and defined, itself, by historic social and political changes. It was also a period during which the aftermath of the French revolution and subsequent wars led to a re-evaluation of history. Political and social changes were so far-reaching that even perceptions of time and space underwent radical revisions. As Bernard puts it: ‘l’immense rebaptême effectué par la Révolution et l’Empire [...] ne touche pas seulement les domaines politique, administratif ou militaire mais tous les secteurs des relations civiles, et jusqu’aux catégories de l’espace et du temps’ (1996: 19).

Among the lower classes in particular, agricultural and Christian notions of time were affected by urbanization and secularization (Bernard 1996: 19), while writers and philosophers imposed their own temporal divisions.<sup>42</sup> Such ‘customized’ divisions and appropriations of time found a literary echo in the *roman-feuilleton*, a mode of publication which saw fiction published in periodical instalments.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, ‘toutes les vicissitudes du temps se répercutent sur l’art, de sa production à sa commercialisation et à sa réception’ (Bernard 1996: 133). Literary works were thus ‘*historiques* à double titre’ (Marcandier-Colard 1998: 13, emphasis in original), in that their production as well as their content was conditioned by history and temporality.

As well as being ‘doubly historical’, the historical adventure novel was also ‘doublement populaire’ (Bernard 1996: 105) in that, as Mombert explains, both

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<sup>42</sup> Bernard gives the example of Condorcet, who ‘enchaînait neuf périodes qui débouchaient sur la République française [...]. D’autres proposent d’autres divisions, qui empiètent sur l’avenir [...]’ (1996: 20).

<sup>43</sup> See Bernard’s references to Ricœur 1983-5 (1996: 59). On serialization, see VI.1 below.

history and culture came to be seen as public property in the wake of the Revolution: ‘le roman historique représente l’une des voies les plus prometteuses pour atteindre un nouveau public lisant, aussi avide de participer à la représentation de sa propre Histoire que d’accéder à la culture promise à tous par la France révolutionnée’ (Mombert 2000: 118).

The relationship between popular fiction and the historical novel is thus a particularly interesting one, and made more so by the fact that the novel, traditionally preoccupied with the individual, now had to acknowledge and reflect the pre-eminence of the group:

Quoique centré par vocation sur l’individu, le roman ne peut plus ignorer l’irruption du grand nombre et de la masse dans l’Histoire. Du coup, lui-même déborde volontiers le récit singulier d’une aventure singulière pour reconstruire tout un microcosme, et prolifère en « série ».  
(Bernard 1996: 33)<sup>44</sup>

While Balzac and Zola exemplified this shift with *La Comédie humaine* and *Les Rougon-Macquart* respectively, the series was also a defining characteristic of popular fiction, which often followed the same characters through a variety of adventures distributed across several volumes.

The scope and the interconnectedness of history evoked by Bernard, who asks: ‘Y a-t-il à proprement parler des faits historiques ? Non ; l’histoire est plutôt un continu d’identités, tout comme la plante ou l’espèce sont la durée d’un même tissu’ (1996: 27), is clearly akin to Boyer’s conception of paraliterature as a single, vast text: ‘L’œuvre paralittéraire ne résiderait pas en un seul récit, mais dans l’ensemble

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<sup>44</sup> On the importance of groups in the *mystères*, see IV.2 above.

des récits d'une série, elle serait la somme des énoncés et se manifesterait par la somme des versions qui la fondent' (1987: 100).<sup>45</sup>

History and literature also share a certain precarious nature, according to Bernard, which means that historical novels exemplify the fragile, ephemeral nature of popular fiction:

emporté comme l'Histoire-passé par l'Histoire-devenir, le discours sur le passé n'échappe pas plus qu'elle à l'érosion du même à la ruine. Que de romans historiques devenus illisibles ! Des centaines de titres que vit naître le XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle, combien sont familiers au lecteur d'aujourd'hui ? (1996: 188).

Mystery is a key notion in historical fiction, but the ambiguous project of showing<sup>46</sup> and concealing which I have already shown to be fundamental to my corpus, is a pitfall of historical writing, which can, paradoxically, serve to obscure rather than preserve elements of the past:

loin de préserver l'événement, l'inscription redouble le gommage, des choses et des signes. L'Histoire apparaît alors comme un palimpseste, gros de révélations, mais de révélations enfouies. Quant au téméraire gratteur de papier, historien, mémorialiste ou romancier, qui prétend les mettre au jour, ne les enfonce-t-il pas, par son tracé à lui, plus profondément dans le mutisme ? [...] dans le cimetière surpeuplé de l'Histoire, les épitaphes se chevauchent, se superposent, s'annihilent. Monument illisible – et brouillé encore par les empreintes de ce fouilleur de tombes qu'est l'historien ou le romancier. (Bernard 1996: 295)

The particular resonance of the historical novel in the context of the *mystères urbains* seems to have been linked to an acute awareness and fear of 'la rapidité de l'obsolescence' (Bernard 1996: 185) and of 'la précarité de l'événement ; [qui] surgit, sévit, s'évanouit pour faire place à d'autres événements qui à leur tour sévissent et s'évanouissent' (Bernard 1996: 295). Gill refers to:

<sup>45</sup> See also Couégnas 1992: 75-6.

<sup>46</sup> 'The historical novel has a humanist impulse to teach and educate, and this pedagogical element is crucial for Lukács; it is the movement to historicised revelation and understanding which is the point of the exercise' (De Groot 2010: 29).

A mournful sense [...] that *Paris inconnu*, the unknown Paris, was on the cusp of disappearance: 'it fascinated nineteenth-century readers, at once drawn and repulsed by the mysteries lurking beneath the surface of city life, and aware that new forms of industry and urban rebuilding projects threatened to do away with a world that still looked, behaved, and smelled like a remnant of the Middle Ages'. (2009: 175-6)<sup>47</sup>

Historical depictions of Paris were therefore a means of counteracting the process of change, of preserving and fixing the city and thereby achieving a reassuring sense of mastery.

Linked to this fear of endings was an analogous fascination with origins and beginnings. Bernard even refers to 'un siècle *obsédé* par la question des commencements' (1996: 21, my emphasis). This was an interdisciplinary obsession, with manifestations which ranged from Darwin's *Origin of the Species* (1859) to a preoccupation in the field of literary history with the origins of genres and individual works (Bernard 1996: 22).<sup>48</sup> But identifying origins often proved a decidedly complex task:

« L'Histoire ne commence et ne finit nulle part », écrit Louis Blanc ; « les faits dont se compose le train du monde présentent tant de confusion et ont entre eux des affinités si obscures, qu'il n'est pas d'événement dont on puisse marquer avec certitude soit la cause première, soit l'aboutissement suprême ». (Bernard 1996: 21)<sup>49</sup>

Blanc's observation reminds us of the risk, acknowledged in my opening chapters, of treating Sue's *Mystères de Paris* as a sort of starting point *par excellence* for a series of hypertextual transformations, without considering the various influences that shaped the hypotext itself. As Bernard puts it: 'Le document imaginaire se donne comme origine de la création alors qu'il en est produit, comme en amont d'elle alors

<sup>47</sup> Gill quotes Seigel 1999: 139-40

<sup>48</sup> The latter often linked to something of an overzealous desire for classification and mastery.

<sup>49</sup> Bernard's quotation is from Blanc (1869: 1).



qu'il est en aval' (1996: 142). This notion of history as text was famously posited by Alfred de Vigny in the preface to his novel *Cinq-Mars*, where he declared that 'L'HISTOIRE EST UN ROMAN DONT LE PEUPLE EST L'AUTEUR' (Bernard 1996: 66; De Groot 2010: 30). Hugo builds on this image, suggesting that history is not only a text, but specifically a hypotext, which would-be authors can only attempt to translate: 'Dieu livre aux hommes ses volontés visibles dans les événements, texte obscur écrit dans une langue mystérieuse. Les hommes en font sur-le-champ des traductions ; traductions hâtives, incorrectes, pleines de fautes, de lacunes et de contresens' (Hugo 1967-70 [1867]: 606).<sup>50</sup>

So historical fiction implies several layers of 'history', and multiple retellings, within a single text, or as Bernard puts it, '[un] [p]assé indéfini, autrement dit « passé composé » [...]'. Recomposé une première fois par l'historiographie ; et recomposé encore (on voudrait dire « surcomposé ») par le roman historique [...]' (1996: 12).

Bernard refers to *Histoire-temps* (historical events); *Histoire-discours* (historiography, or the discourse pertaining to those events), and *histoire (roman)* (the 'story'), divided further by Genette (1972) into *narration* (the written composition itself) and *diégèse* (the imaginary events being recounted) (1996: 70 and 66-7). Barbéris (1980) (invoked by Bernard 1996: 70) refers to the same categories, respectively, as *HISTOIRE*, *Histoire* and *histoire*. Whichever set of terminology we prefer, it is clear that historical fiction is, potentially, replete with palimpsests, in that the history and historiography behind a text, as well as the 'story' itself, can be rewritten.

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<sup>50</sup> See also Bernard's reference to Herbert Butterfield's idea that 'un événement est « mis en fiction » comme un poème en musique' (1996: 9).

The nineteenth-century re-evaluation of history also meant that the notion was no longer restricted to the past, but enlarged to accommodate a marked interest in both ‘contemporary history’ and also in the future, or what Bernard terms ‘l’Histoire-devenir’ (1996: 67),<sup>51</sup> both explicitly linked to the past, with inevitable implications for historical fiction.

Popular fiction and particularly adventure novels exemplify this shift in emphasis from past to future, as Bernard, with reference to Dumas, explains:

ces événements ne relèvent plus tant de l’advenu historique que de l’aventure romanesque ; plus de ce qui est déjà venu, survenu dans le temps, et le cas échéant vous revient à la mémoire, mais de ce qui reste à venir (*ad-ventura*).  
(Bernard 1996: 98)

Although the historical knowledge we bring to a text often means that we know the ultimate outcome before reading it, we lack knowledge of the fictional part of the text. Put differently, though we are sure of our destination, the route we will take to arrive at that destination remains a mystery. As Bernard puts it: ‘L’atout du roman historique est de pouvoir transformer l’advenu en aventure: de nous faire oublier ce que nous savons, et que nous savons être accompli, pour nous le faire revivre dans son accomplissement, ouvert, instable, palpitant’ (Bernard 1996: 98-9). Our knowledge of the past is therefore subordinated to its re-enactment in an open-ended, thrilling present. Zaccone’s choice of a Renaissance setting for his *Mystères du vieux Paris* is significant in this respect, as this period was, as he puts it ‘le point de départ des sociétés modernes, vers l’art de l’avenir’ (VIEUX I: 178). The temporal setting could even be interpreted as a metafictional wink, in that the Renaissance was

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<sup>51</sup> Bernard gives as an example Aragon who, in *La Semaine Sainte* (1958) ‘refuse d’être historique au sens de tourné vers le passé [...], il se présente comme « une grande quête de l’avenir »’ and Hugo, who in *Quatrevingt-Treize* combines ‘une focalisation sur l’Histoire passée dans son infiniment petit, ses costumes, ses accessoires, ses supplices, ses potins, et une vision panoramique de l’Histoire-devenir’ (1996: 89-90 and 91).

essentially to do with the resurgence of ideas from an earlier period (the Italian term *Rinascimento* literally means ‘rebirth’), just as Zaccone’s text was a rewriting of that of Sue. As the nineteenth-century progressed, the potentiality of the future was broached even more explicitly in early works of science fiction, such as those of Jules Verne.

This redefinition of History, to encompass the future as well as the past, and the concomitant broadening of diegetic interest, has important implications for my intertextual study, in that it echoes the synchronic nature of intertextuality (Moi 1986; Orr 2003). In much the same way that History looks to the future as well as the past, the text must be seen to engage in a two-way dialogue, both inflected by previous texts and inflecting, in turn, subsequent ones.

Sue was no stranger to historical writing prior to *Les Mystères de Paris*, having produced a maritime history entitled *Histoire de la marine française depuis le XV<sup>e</sup> siècle jusqu’à nos jours, précédée d’un précis historique sur la marine française depuis le IX<sup>e</sup> siècle jusqu’au XV<sup>e</sup>* (the first volume of ten appearing in 1835) (Bory 1962: 174-5), as well as a number of historical novels, including *Latréaumont* (1837), set in the era of Louis XIV and La Fronde. Sue’s final work, *Les Mystères du peuple ou histoire d’une famille de prolétaires à travers les âges* (1849-56) was an epic history of the proletarian Lebrenn and the noble Plouermel families from 57BC until the reign of Napoleon III (Bory 1962: 335). Some twentieth-century critics argued, unconvincingly, that *Les Mystères de Paris* had some value as a historical document:

L’importance sociale de ce roman, comme celle d’autres grands romans de ce temps, vient de ce que les auteurs décrivent une société et une époque auxquelles ils appartiennent. [...] L’extraordinaire authenticité des *Mystères*

*de Paris*, de la même manière que celle des *Misérables*, vient de ce que ces ouvrages enregistrent passivement ces évolutions démographiques et économiques que nous avons évoquées. Ils sont de leur temps et ne peuvent faire autrement que d'attribuer à la société qu'ils décrivent des caractères que leurs auteurs connaissent [...]. (Chevalier 2007 [1958]: 514-5)

While Chevalier's claims as to the authenticity of the material and the disinterestedness of its author are highly questionable, more recent research has put a rather more convincing case for reading *Les Mystères de Paris* as a socio-historical document. For Prendergast (2003), the text's historical value lies not in Sue's narrative, but rather in the records of the abundant, ongoing correspondence Sue received from members of the public, and the role of these documents in the elaboration of his text.<sup>52</sup>

Zaccone's *Mystères du vieux Paris* uses history in a number of very different, and frequently much more self-conscious, ways. There are frequent references to time, age, history and fatality in the text. The past is clearly linked to the central theme of *revenge*: 'voilà vingt années que je prépare la vengeance, vingt années que j'attends l'heure,' says le Lombard (VIEUX II: 305).

Old age is portrayed negatively. Le Lombard is frequently referred to as le *vieux* Lombard (e.g. VIEUX I: 247) and the prévôt tells him: 'tu es vieux, à ton âge, l'ambition est morte, on se retire du monde, on vit à part... on ne désire plus rien... mais tu as un fils, Réault, un fils jeune, ardent, avide ; la vie s'ouvre à peine devant lui...' (VIEUX III: 154-5). This is in stark contrast to the depiction of youth which, it is suggested, either stands outside of time ('De gais amis, de folles chansons, *la vie sans passé et sans lendemain*' (VIEUX I: 48, my emphasis)) or else acts as a

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<sup>52</sup> As Dumasy points out, all (romantic) novels have an historical dimension, even if this is only implicit (2006: 12-3). On the inherently historical nature of Balzac's works ('histoire des mœurs' rather than 'histoire des faits'), see Roy-Reverzy (2000: 136) and also Couégnas 2000: 164. On the acute awareness of nineteenth-century authors that novels classed as *romans de mœurs contemporaines* were the *romans historiques* of the future, with specific reference to Stendhal, see Bernard (1996: 36).

valuable link to the future. Rustique's freedom and adventurous spirit is a direct result of his having no family ties and so no links to the past: 'il était libre de tout engagement antérieur, l'avenir était bien à lui, puisqu'aucun lien ne l'attachait au passé' (VIEUX II: 4).

These are relatively unremarkable features, in that we find very similar preoccupations in many works of nineteenth-century popular fiction. What is important here is that time is central to the notion of mystery. The past is a hiding place: 'J'ai toujours pensé que, dans son présent si placide et si calme, le vieux Lombard cachait un passé redoutable,' says Coquastre (VIEUX I: 148-9), whose impression is an accurate one :

Il y avait dans ces deux hommes [le Lombard et le prévôt], une de ces haines vivaces et fortes [...]. La cause de cette haine était cachée dans les mystères de quelque drame ténébreux ; nul ne la connaissait peut-être, le souvenir en était resté *enfoui dans le passé*... Il n'avait survécu que dans le cœur du vieux Lombard ! (VIEUX II: 311-2, my emphasis)

The same is true of the future: 'L'amour garde encore tous ces mystères, et *l'avenir cache profondément ses douloureux secrets*,' the narrator tells us (VIEUX I: 7, my emphasis).

Age is frequently difficult to ascertain, thus providing another source of mystery. Le Lombard is described as having '[une] apparence de vieillesse anticipée' (VIEUX II: 313) and Rustique doesn't even know his own age: '– Mais quel âge est donc le vôtre ? – Je l'ignore' (VIEUX I: 85).

### ***Histoire and histoire***

Another very specific use of history in the text stems from the fact, already acknowledged above, that historical fiction implies multiple palimpsests, a rewriting

of *Histoire* as well as of *histoire*. As a result, many features characteristic of the *mystères urbains* in general find themselves showcased and magnified in this historical version. Techniques common to the *histoire* of the *mystères urbains*, and to that of the *roman-feuilleton* generally, are repeated at the *Histoire* level and thus foregrounded for the reader. The *récit du passé* is a good example of this phenomenon.<sup>53</sup> In *Les Mystères de Paris*, we have chapters entitled ‘Histoire de la Goualeuse’, ‘Histoire du Chourineur’ and ‘Histoire de David et Cecily’ (MP: 47-59, 59-67, 200-207, respectively) in which the stories of characters’ lives prior to the diegesis are recounted *en abyme*. In *Les Mystères du vieux Paris*, this process is much more self-conscious, in that the reader has already taken a step into the past (sixteenth-century Paris). The addition of an additional *récit du passé* within the main narrative (such as the story told by Rustique in the chapter entitled ‘Et de la singulière histoire que ce quidam raconta l’épée à la main’ (VIEUX I: 90-7), Viviane’s story (VIEUX III: 246-49), or that of Rustique’s parents, Réault (le Lombard) and Eléonore, in the chapter entitled ‘Le Passé’ (VIEUX III: 195-213)) has the effect of doubling the temporal exoticism. These (hi)stories *en abyme*<sup>54</sup> function as a subtle self-parody, foregrounding the fictional devices at work in the text. As Rose puts it, *mise en abyme*, ‘has the function of distinguishing the fictional nature of the work offered to the public from the public world by providing a mirror to the fiction’ (1979: 72). The reader’s attention is thus diverted from the mysteries of the city to those of the text itself.

<sup>53</sup> On this structural device in the early *roman policier*, see Lavergne 2009: 34-7.

<sup>54</sup> According to Dällenbach, ‘est mise en abyme tout miroir interne réfléchissant l’ensemble du récit par reduplication simple, répétée, ou spéculaire’ (1977: 52).

Similarly, Mouchy's acute awareness of all things temporal perhaps has a metafictional resonance, in that it could be seen to echo the awareness that Zaccone, as a *feuilleton* writer, must have had himself:<sup>55</sup>

Voyez-vous, jeune homme, poursuit complaisamment Mouchy, dans la vie, tout dépend, non des choses que l'on entreprend, mais de l'heure à laquelle on les exécute. Ce qui est bien aujourd'hui, sera peut-être mal demain. La véritable science, la seule, consiste à ne rien faire qu'à son heure, et en son temps... (VIEUX II: 15)

Numerous references to 'fate' in the text have the same metafictional resonance, if they are applied to *histoire* as well as *Histoire*. Rustique declares 'ma conduite est déjà tracée...' (VIEUX I: 258) and notes a 'prédestination fatale' which appears to be guiding him (VIEUX III: 92). Whether we buy Rustique's belief in this historical fate or not, his fictional destiny is certainly assured, in line with the formulaic conventions of popular fiction.

A similar effect is achieved with regard to death in the text. According to Bernard, historical representations are 'en perpétuelle négociation avec la mort', in that '[la mort] est l'état même du passé, et le roman historique doit en arracher ses personnages, pour les rendre artistiquement à la vie' (1996: 155 and 102). Reanimation and restoration are performed on characters and on the city itself (1996: 156-7), as the narrator's choice of language in the following extract confirms:

Et maintenant que nous avons tenté de *ressusciter* un moment les choses et les hommes du passé, imaginez-vous que vous vous trouvez transporté, un matin de l'année 1549, sur la tour de l'église Saint-Jacques-la-Boucherie, et que vous assistez tout à coup au réveil de cette ville et de ses habitants. (VIEUX I: 203, my emphasis)

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<sup>55</sup> As already noted in the introduction to this chapter, 'toutes les vicissitudes du temps se répercutent sur l'art, de sa production à sa commercialisation et à sa réception' (Bernard 1996: 133).

In many of the *mystères urbains*, we see characters either dismissed as dead, or hovering on the brink of death, only to make miraculous recoveries, allowing them to return to the action. Fleur-de-Marie's rescue from drowning by la Louve is a good example of this (MP: 851-69). Similarly, in Féval's *Mystères de Londres*, Angus MacFarlane is beaten and left for dead by Bob Lantern ('Le corps fit bascule et tomba, inerte, dans la Tamise' (LOND: 150)) only to reappear later in the story. Ismaïl Spencer, supposedly 'pendu l'automne dernier devant Newgate' (LOND: 171) escapes death, thanks to the intervention of le docteur Moore, facilitating his reincarnation under a variety of pseudonyms, including Tyrrel l'Aveugle and Sir Edmund Mackensie (LOND: 97 and 182):

Le docteur Moore vint me voir dans ma prison et me pratiqua au bas de la gorge une petite incision dont il soutint les parois à l'aide d'un tuyau de plume. On appelle cela d'un nom fort bizarre : la pharyngotomie. Quand la corde me serra le cou, je respirai par-dessous la corde, au moyen de mon incision. (LOND: 322)

Characters returning to the diegesis are also frequently referred to as 'ghosts'. In Zola's *Mystères de Marseille*, Philippe, returning to Marseille after a period of exile is described as 'un revenant' (MARS: 299). In Lermina's *Mystères de New-York*, this is given a fantastical twist, with the genuinely dead character Effie returning from beyond the grave to wreak revenge on Bam, the husband who has murdered her: 'devant lui se dresse le *spectre* de la femme qu'il a assassinée, Effie Tillinghast... [...] *Effie dont la mort n'a pas voulu*' (NYORK: 343, my emphases).

Zacccone's text effects a number of very similar 'resuscitations', and the epithet 'plus mort que vif', used, for example, to describe Blondel (VIEUX III: 17) and Marcelle (VIEUX III: 173), is recurrent. After their duel ends in 'un coup double', we are led to believe that Rustique and Georges are dead:



Rustique et Georges étaient tombés en même temps, percés l'un et l'autre d'un coup d'épée en pleine poitrine. – La blessure était mortelle : il y avait peu d'espoir de les sauver.

Les deux corps furent donc déposés, sans plus attendre, dans chacune des deux barques, et le funèbre convoi reprit lentement sa route vers la rive opposée. (VIEUX II: 209-10)

But both characters recover and return to the action. Similarly, when le Lombard and Jacques administer drops of a mysterious potion to the sleeping Marcelle, we are told she is dead:

L'effet fut terrible et instantané.

La jeune fille se tordit immédiatement dans des convulsions horribles ; ses joues devinrent pâles, ses lèvres bleuèrent, son cœur cessa de battre.

– Morte ! s'écria Jacques, qui ne put réprimer un frémissement. (VIEUX III: 54)

The assertion is even repeated for emphasis:

– Demain, le prévôt pleurera toutes les larmes de ses yeux, quand il apprendra que madame Marcelle, sa fille chérie, lui a été enlevé.

– Et qu'elle est morte, ajouta Jacques

– Et qu'elle est morte !..... répéta le Lombard, dont le regard s'éclaira d'une joie de chat de tigre. (VIEUX III: 61)

And yet Marcelle revives just a few pages later:

Marcelle [...] semblait peu à peu revenir du long et lourd sommeil qui avait jusqu'alors engourdi ses membres : ses bras se détendirent ; son sein se gonfla péniblement ; elle passa, à plusieurs reprises, ses mains sur son front et dans ses cheveux épars, et finit par ouvrir les yeux. (VIEUX III: 83-4)

Like Zola's Philippe, le Lombard is a 'ghost' from the past: 'Pendant vingt années, il avait caché son secret, comme un avare cache son trésor ; il s'était dissimulé à tous les regards, il avait fui, *on l'avait cru mort...*' (VIEUX II: 311-2, my emphasis).

What makes Zaccone's text slightly different from the other *mystères urbains* is that the dramatic 'resuscitations' are all the more striking in that the characters, inevitably, given the distant temporal setting, have already been 'brought back to life', from History. Rustique's description as 'une victime vouée d'avance à la mort' (VIEUX II: 318), as he fights with Jacques-le-Majeur, thus has a resonance within the narrative, but also beyond it. Any death in the diegesis must be seen as a second death. In her discussion of this phenomenon in the historical novel in general, Bernard refers to 'la réassomption du risque de mort' (1996: 159, my emphasis) and acknowledges the self-consciousness which results from this:

les morts rendus à la vie le sont du même coup à la mortalité. Quant aux « revenants » que secrète macabrement l'aventure, auraient-ils aussi pour mission, dans le roman historique, de nous rappeler qu'en un sens, tous les personnages qui s'y présentent sont des revenants ? (1996: 159)

Additional resuscitations, within the diegesis, or across a whole series of texts, as with Ponson du Terrail's *La Résurrection de Rocambole* (1865-6), thus take on a certain self-consciousness, and perhaps even a note of self-parody.

The episode in which Viviane tells Rustique that the only way he can protect himself is by feigning death is especially significant, and could be seen as a metafictional nod to the would-be deaths that proliferate in these popular novels:

Le seul moyen qui vous reste d'échapper aux assassins apostés par Mouchy, c'est de leur faire croire que j'ai rempli ma mission et que leur office est inutile. [...] prenez quelques gouttes de ce narcotique, et quand les assassins de Mouchy viendront, ils ne trouveront ici qu'un cadavre.  
(VIEUX III: 261-2)

This amounts to the wry introduction of a narrative trick into the diegesis. 'Playing dead' is, effectively, what the narrator has all of his characters doing in the previous examples. Thus the duping of le Lombard and Marcelle's father, the prévôt, who

arrive and find the two lovers supposedly dead, is analogous to the duping of the reader before them:

ils aperçurent les deux cadavres étendus sans vie sur le parquet, un même cri d'épouvante et d'horreur s'échappa en même temps de leurs lèvres, et ils coururent s'agenouiller, le prévôt près de Marcelle, le Lombard près de Rustique.

– Morte !... balbutia le premier.

– Mort ! fit le second. (VIEUX III: 292-3)

Again, the repetition is emphatic, and deliberately evocative of the very similar conversation between le Lombard and Jacques-le-Majeur discussed above, with the significant difference that it is the characters, rather than the reader, who now find themselves on the receiving end of the trickery. Inevitably, as le Lombard and the prévôt fight, believing their children dead, the effect of the potion wears off, and Rustique and Marcelle stir (VIEUX III: 297).

Similarly playful and self-conscious is the way in which Zaccone frequently invokes Hugo, whose *Notre-Dame de Paris* (1831) had been the culmination of a romantic vogue for the Middle Ages throughout the 1820s and 1830s (Bernard 1996: 108),<sup>56</sup> and is effusive in his praise (Appendix VIII.5.9).

The references to Hugo invite comparison and thus serve to foreground the historical dimension of Zaccone's text.<sup>57</sup> The references also act as a sort of mystification, setting in motion a game in which the reader's expectations are alternately stimulated and disappointed.<sup>58</sup> The title of the novel, for example, is clearly calqued on Sue's model, and yet Zaccone makes no explicit reference to Sue

<sup>56</sup> Mathé refers to the notion of 'belles époques', the temporal equivalent of 'grands espaces' such as the ocean or the Orient, 'propres à éveiller le sentiment exotique' (1985: 23-4). According to Durand-le-Guern, 'L'aventure napoléonienne' is an epoch of similar fictional richness, 'un temps éminemment romanesque' (2006: 257).

<sup>57</sup> De Groot observes a similar tactic in *A Tale of Two Cities*, in which Dickens 'cites [...] Thomas Carlyle's famous *French Revolution: A History* (1837), and suggests through association that his novel whilst inferior, is similar in its ability to communicate the events of the past' (2010: 36).

<sup>58</sup> On generic mystification in Mérimée, see Mombert 2000: 128-9.

or *Les Mystères de Paris*. There are, however, a number of nods to Hugo's *Notre-Dame de Paris*. The story of Coquastre, 'trouvé un beau matin sur les marches du parvis Notre-Dame, criant de sa petite voix aiguë et perçante, et levant ses bras blancs vers le ciel' (VIEUX I: 14) is certainly reminiscent of that of Quasimodo. Le Lombard's solitary occupation of the tour de l'église Saint-Jacques-la-Boucherie is another Hugolian echo. The reader is thus thrown a playful challenge: can he find evidence of Sue's influence beyond the paratext, or does the text genuinely owe more to Hugo?<sup>59</sup>

There are also a number of playful, self-consciously historical references: '[H]âtons-nous de rejoindre la taverne de Quinepue,' declares d'Aubigny, one of the main characters, in the opening chapter, '*car j'ai la langue sèche comme un vieux parchemin*' (VIEUX I: 28, my emphasis). Zaccone is also quick to pre-empt (and thereby counter) criticism regarding historical detail. When Jacques-le-Majeur's daughter, Viviane, makes her first appearance in the story, the narrator's inclusion of the song she is singing, which we are told is characteristic of the period, is tentative and apologetic: 'La chanson était un curieux échantillon de l'époque. – Pourquoi ne la donnerions-nous pas ? Elle ne peut que compléter le tableau. [...]' (VIEUX I: 236). Similarly, prior to a description of the duel between Georges and Rustique, we are told:

Pour que le lecteur comprenne bien la situation respective de nos personnages, et les événements qui vont suivre, il importe, croyons-nous, de dire ici quelques mots des duels en général, et des réglemens particuliers introduits depuis quelques temps sur la matière. Le duel est d'ailleurs un des côtés caractéristiques des mœurs du Moyen-Age, et rentre naturellement dans le cadre que nous nous sommes tracés en commençant le *Vieux Paris*. (VIEUX II: 195)<sup>60</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Or indeed other well-known historical novels. Balzac, for example, in his 1831 preface to *La Peau de chagrin* referred to 'le récit « walterscotté »' (Bernard 1996: 52).

<sup>60</sup> One concession to this exaggerated, heavy-handed exoticism is the occasional recourse to what Lukács (1962) calls the necessary anachronism, whereby exotic elements are translated into modern

This deliberate, self-conscious approach is clearly another means of foregrounding the temporal exoticism on which the text's commercial success hinged, and thereby detracting attention from less original aspects of the text. Bernard warns that this can be an extremely risky tactic, and that preoccupation with the means of representing temporal detail, rather than the detail itself, can mean that the text becomes 'une sorte d'étalage du passé dans ses attraits les plus superficiels. [...] non contente de transférer l'intérêt de l'action sur *le décor représenté*, elle le détourne sur *l'acte de représentation* [...]' (1996: 107, my emphases).

If Zaccone's text manages to avoid such excessive self-consciousness, this is because elements of historical detail, which may appear superficial and gratuitous in isolation, frequently come together to evoke a kind of hidden, alternative, counter-history. This new approach to history had begun with the romantics, as Durand-Le Guern explains, stressing the importance of the fall of Napoleon:

il ne s'agit pas d'écrire l'Histoire, parce qu'il n'y a rien à écrire, qu'elle s'est arrêtée le 18 juin 1815, et il ne reste plus qu'à explorer, avec plus ou moins de bonheur, une forme d'« envers de l'histoire contemporaine ». (2006: 264)

Bernard's description of the types of character depicted in such counter-histories is strikingly reminiscent of *Les Mystères du vieux Paris* and indeed the *mystères urbains* in general:

Au déplacement de la perspective temporelle [...] répond un déplacement au niveau actantiel : le roman historique convoque des êtres ou des facettes des êtres longtemps dédaignés par les érudits.

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parlance. For Lukács, this is particularly a stylistic issue: '« l'anachronisme nécessaire » est plus nécessaire que jamais dans les questions d'écriture, afin que l'étrangeté de la forme ne détourne pas notre attention des contenus' (Bernard 1996: 107): 'Marcelle était si jeune ; elle n'avait pas *ce que l'on appellerait aujourd'hui l'expérience du cœur* ; elle se demandait naïvement, avec une sorte d'épouvante même, quel malheur lui présageaient les singuliers symptômes qui la troublaient si profondément' (VIEUX III: 35, my emphasis).

D'abord, parallèlement aux petits faits, il se penche sur ces catégories mineures, minoritaires, marginales ou opprimées [...] pègre parisienne [...] ; paysans lombards [...]. (1996: 113)<sup>61</sup>

Zaccone's stock of characters ticks all of Bernard's boxes. To give just a few examples, we have the criminal Jacques-le-Majeur, who we first encounter escaping out of a tavern window, having attacked one of the prévôt's sons, one of the 'vingt mille bandits, voleurs ou assassins que Paris renfermait dans son enceinte ; gens de sac et de corde, que la peur du gibet n'arrêtait pas, et qui pillaient, volaient, incendiaient et tuaient avec une audace sans égale' (VIEUX I: 199). Maître Blondel has a similarly appropriate marginal status, as a hardworking *armurier* who pushes for reform on behalf of his workers ('il faut bien que nous parlions de cette brave et laborieuse population de Paris [...]') (VIEUX I: 201)), but is terrorized by the prévôt and his henchmen when he gives shelter to the enigmatic Rustique, arrived in Paris from the provinces. We also have the elderly Lombard, whose name, like that of Rustique, is a clear indication of his 'otherness', who lives a solitary life in la tour de l'église Saint-Jacques-la-Boucherie, harbouring a terrible secret. Zaccone's text is not the only one of my corpus to bring to life such historical 'others'. Zola's *Mystères de Marseille*, originally subtitled 'Roman historique contemporain', tells the story of republicans participating in the 1848 revolution, not in Paris, but in Marseille.<sup>62</sup> The emphasis placed on these marginal characters appears to be a very

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<sup>61</sup> This shift in subject matter necessitates a different approach on the part of the writer, as Bernard remarks, invoking Vigny (1828: 886): 'L'histoire [...] présente aux hommes le sens philosophique et le spectacle *extérieur* des faits vus dans leur ensemble, le roman historique donne l'*intérieur* de ces mêmes faits examinés dans leur détail (...) L'historien doit se placer pour considérer le passé comme le peintre d'un Panorama sur la plus haute élévation de la terre ; le romancier doit descendre dans la vallée comme le peintre de genre, s'asseoir dans les chaumières et sous les buissons' (Bernard 1996: 105). Though Vigny uses pastoral imagery to make his point, it seems equally relevant in the context of urban literature.

<sup>62</sup> Bernard notes the same tactic in *La Fortune du Rougon*, which recounts the 1851 coup d'État in Plassans rather than Paris (1996: 114). This approach could be seen to prefigure twentieth-century subversive or revisionist historical fiction (De Groot, 2010: 5 and 70), which seeks 'to challenge

deliberate choice, and is the subject of much self-conscious musing on the part of the narrator (Appendix VIII.5.10).

With *Histoire* subordinated to *histoire*, and precedence given to what would have been marginal characters in more traditional historical novels, it is well-known historical figures who now find themselves on the peripheries. For example, when Rustique eavesdrops on a conversation between two women, Eléonore and Diane, both he and the reader are unaware that the latter is Diane de Poitiers (VIEUX II: 34-7). It is only later that le Lombard asks: ‘N’avez-vous point remarqué dans cette fête splendide la véritable reine du Louvre, la charmante et toujours gracieuse Diane de Poitiers ?’ (VIEUX II: 72). If Rustique hasn’t noticed, it is because he has fallen in love with Marcelle, whose beauty eclipses even the presence of the king: ‘Si Henri II était le roi de cette fête, [Marcelle] semblait en être la reine’ (VIEUX I: 299). The fascination with Marcelle is not limited to the hero and the reader, but even extends to the king himself: ‘les regards se portèrent avides vers la porte d’entrée, le roi lui-même abandonna l’estrade qui lui avait été élevée, pour aller recevoir la personne dont ce mouvement annonçait l’arrivée’ (VIEUX II: 28-9). Rustique echoes the narrator’s observation: ‘Le roi [...] lui aussi vous trouvait belle entre toutes... et quand il s’est penché pour vous le dire, sans doute, vous m’êtes apparue comme la véritable reine de cette nuit féerique’ (VIEUX II: 45).

Eléonore, the other participant in the conversation, will also come to play a central part in the story, before Rustique finally discovers her to be his mother. The role of Diane de Poitiers and Henri II seems to be to provide a semblance of reality to proceedings, but their historical resonance is ultimately unable to compete with the fictional significance of the other characters. As Ansel puts it: ‘l’Histoire n’est

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mainstream and repressive narratives: [...] to ‘write back’; [...] to reclaim marginalised identities; [...] to posit or explore new ideological positions’ (De Groot 2010: 3).

qu'un « effet de réel » servant d'alibi à une fiction qui ne lésine pas sur les ingrédients romanesques' (2000: 115).

Similarly, historically significant events are only 'saisi[s] de manière périphérique' (Durand-Le Guern 2006: 254).<sup>63</sup> For example, although references are made to the passage of Henri II through Paris throughout the first volume (e.g. VIEUX I: 27 and 284), it is the arrival of Rustique in the city which will prove the most significant event. Historical events provide an excuse for suspense ('J'entends, si je ne me trompe,' says Rustique to Mouchy, 'les fanfares qui annoncent le cortège du roi, et si vous le voulez bien, nous allons suspendre un moment notre conversation' (VIEUX I: 292)) but have no direct bearing on the characters or action.

The narrator refers explicitly to the way in which he separates *Histoire* and *histoire*, so that conventionally historical elements are never allowed to detract from his alternative history:

Nous avons essayé d'esquisser la physionomie de Paris à l'époque où nous plaçons ce récit ; nous avons tenté de rendre notre tableau le plus complet possible, nous l'avons considéré non seulement sous les rapports plastique et moral, mais encore sous le côté artistique et pittoresque. Nous n'ajouterons pas un mot de plus.

Il est temps d'ailleurs que nous retournions aux personnages de notre drame. (VIEUX I: 211-2)

He also appears to be much more interested in the detail of daily life than in any grandiose historical events, hence a number of passages similar to the following, in which Blondel saunters home from morning mass:

Paris s'était déjà réveillé, et de toutes parts, la vie avait repris son mouvement accoutumé.

Sur son passage, les boutiques s'ouvraient avec un bruit assourdissant de ferrailles ; les voisins et les voisines se saluaient de la voix et du geste ; on

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<sup>63</sup> Durand-le-Guern notes a similar 'restriction du champ' in *Le Comte de Monte-Cristo*, in which 'les événements historiques ne sont pris en compte que dans la mesure où ils sont susceptibles d'affecter le protagoniste' (2006: 253).



se demandait des nouvelles de la nuit ; on racontait ses projets pour le jour : les crieurs commençaient à circuler à travers les rues des différents quartiers [...]. (VIEUX II: 229-31)

This approach to history is very much in line with what Lukács terms ‘historical faithfulness’ (1962: 44). As De Groot explains, this is typified by an emphasis on minor details and marginalized characters, with the ‘poetic awakening’ of protagonists and the ‘re-experience’ of the ‘social and human motives of behaviour’ given priority over the retelling of specific events (De Groot 2010: 27-8; Lukács 1962: 42).

So the interest in ‘alternative histories’ was by no means the exclusive preserve of the *mystères urbains* but was also found in other types of historical fiction<sup>64</sup> and has been advocated by the historical novel’s key theorists. But alternative histories, or ‘historical faithfulness’, however we choose to label it, was especially important in these texts, in that it was a means of perpetuating and also revitalizing the exoticism of *Les Mystères de Paris*. If Sue finds his inspiration in ‘des régions horribles, inconnues [...]’ (MP: 31), Zaccane creates a temporal equivalent of these dark, unknown spaces by exploring the unseen, the ‘forgotten people’, and the ‘unhistoric acts’ (De Groot 2010: 37) of his *vieux Paris*.

### **Time as place**

The reader is introduced to this temporal *bas-fonds* (for want of a better term) via a series of geographical and spatial analogies. By evoking time in spatial terms, Zaccane’s novel exemplifies the Bakhtinian notion of the ‘chronotope’ (1981). Thus the reader’s temporal distance from the action, taking place in 1547, is echoed by the

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<sup>64</sup> De Groot, for example, compares the attention to minutiae in Eliot’s *Middlemarch* to the epic sweep of Tolstoy’s *War and Peace* (2010: 37).

geographical and social exoticism experienced by the hero, Rustique. He arrives at the taverne Quinepue wearing ‘un costume étrange’, with ‘une coupe spéciale, inconnue dans la capitale’ and covered in ‘la poussière d’un long voyage’ (VIEUX I: 53-4). ‘[V]oilà près de douze heures que je chevauche sur cette route du diable, sans en pouvoir trouver la fin, – pourrais-tu me dire si Paris est encore loin d’ici?’ (VIEUX I: 57) he asks, much to the amusement of the young students in the tavern, who know that he has already arrived.<sup>65</sup> He finds himself ‘[j]eté, inopinément et sans préparation, au milieu de la vie parisienne, ignorant les distances sociales si bien déterminées à cette époque’ (VIEUX I: 251-2).

This link between time and place is sustained throughout the novel. Durand-Le Guern notes two simplistic stereotypes of the period in question, ‘l’une tendant à le constituer en âge d’or de l’héroïsme et de la vertu chevaleresque, l’autre le faisant basculer vers une représentation d’un temps obscur et barbare’ (2000: 85). While Zaccone certainly embraces the former intermittently (‘Coquastre ! [...] C’était le vrai type de la droiture et de l’honnêteté comme l’histoire du Moyen-Age nous en a légué quelques-uns...’ (VIEUX II: 192)), it is the latter which emerges as the more important: ‘Il y a de terribles histoires dans le passé, de *sombres* drames où l’honneur des miens a joué un rôle *sanglant*’ declares Marcelle at one point (VIEUX III: 127-8, my emphases). While heroism and virtue are abstract qualities, ‘obscur et barbare’, ‘sombre’ and ‘sanglant’ are significantly concrete epithets, describing a physical place rather than the values of an epoch.

Zaccone’s *vieux Paris* therefore owes much to the gothic past evoked in the *roman terrifiant* or *roman noir* by the likes of Ann Radcliffe in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and Horace Walpole in *The Castle of Otranto*. As such, Zaccone’s

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<sup>65</sup> On this scene from the novel, and the way in which vague geographical boundaries echo similarly vague boundaries between text and paratext, see also III.1 above.

Renaissance is hard to distinguish from the Middle Ages which formed the temporal backdrop to many popular novels.<sup>66</sup> In fact, in many respects, this is a ‘past’ which, rather than being imbued with historical authenticity or specificity, is actually atemporal.<sup>67</sup> The point of reference for any writing which draws on the gothic tradition is fictional rather than historical; we are dealing with a palimpsest of pre-existing, purportedly historical fiction, rather than a palimpsest of history itself.<sup>68</sup> For Said, who invokes Vico before him, history, just like geographical and cultural entities such as ‘Orient’ and ‘Occident’, is a man-made construction, rather than ‘an inert fact of nature’ (Said 2003 [1978]: 4-5):

[S]pace [according to Bachelard] acquires emotional and even rational sense by a kind of poetic process, whereby the vacant or anonymous reaches of distance are converted into meaning for us here. The same process occurs when we deal with time. Much of what we associate with or even know about such periods as “long ago” or “the beginning” or “at the end of time” is poetic – made up. For a historian of Middle Kingdom Egypt, “long ago” will have a very clear sort of meaning, but even this meaning does not totally dissipate the imaginative, quasi-fictional quality one senses lurking in a time very different and distant from our own. For there is no doubt that imaginative geography and history help the mind to intensify its own sense of itself by dramatizing the distance and difference between what is close to it and what is far away. (Said 2003 [1978]: 55)<sup>69</sup>

What is particularly important about the pre-fabricated, pseudo-history which forms the backdrop to *Les Mystères du vieux Paris* is that it is characterized by a series of clichés, all spatial or physical in some way. De Groot remarks on the emphasis placed on the materiality of history in the gothic novel, noting an obsession with ‘artefacts and evidence of the past (manuscripts, graves, long-hidden passageways

<sup>66</sup> See Andries 2006 and Mombert 2006b.

<sup>67</sup> On the timelessness of stereotype in Dumas, see Durand-le-Guern 2006: 256, 259 and 262. On the same in Scott, see Couégnas 2000: 158.

<sup>68</sup> De Groot, in his discussion of continuations of Jane Austen’s work, which invoke ‘a past which is authenticated not by history but by the world of Austen’s fiction’, proposes the term ‘historiquesque’ (2010: 66).

<sup>69</sup> We are reminded of the idea of Paris as a literary construct, as discussed in II.2 above.

and rituals)’ (2010: 16). Durand-Le Guern, analysing Scott’s *Quentin Durward*, offers a familiar list of these gothic clichés: ‘obscurité, murs épais, chauves-souris, traces de sang, passage secret, etc.’ (2000: 89).

Zaccone’s text employs the same motifs, so that the reader is able to apprehend the notion of time in what are perhaps more familiar physical terms. Drops and trails of blood feature on a number of occasions (e.g. VIEUX I: 119-20 and VIEUX II: 83-4); we see le Lombard entering a ‘tomb-like’ abandoned house which contains ‘une porte dérobée’, ‘un ressort caché’ and a hidden staircase (VIEUX II: 163-4), all of which he navigates to construct a secret passageway to Saint-Paul.

The past is a place of darkness, shadow and night, metaphorical, certainly, but palpable and evocative nonetheless:

*Une nuit épaisse m’environne ; je ne sais où arrêter mes regards incertains, et à chaque pas que je fais dans ce dédale du passé, je rencontre un doute ou une affirmation qui m’épouvante : répondez-moi donc, Marcelle, aidez-moi à apporter la lumière dans ces ténèbres [...].* (VIEUX III: 183-4, my emphases)

Light struggles to penetrate. Again, we are dealing with cliché, but the imagery is stark and effective, helping to concretize the abstract notion of time: ‘sa main se crispait et passait rapide sur son front, comme si la lumière eût dû jaillir à cette impression magnétique. – Mais le passé était plein d’ombre encore’ (VIEUX III: 180).

Another particularly effective physical image of the past is that of the deep sea: ‘Comme un plongeur obstiné, il s’enfonçait avec ardeur sous cette mer profonde, qui renfermait son passé dans ses plis troublés, et cherchait infatigablement quelque souvenir qui pût lui rappeler les jours enfuis...’ (VIEUX III: 179-80, my emphases). This is reminiscent of my own notion of a temporal *bas-*

*fonds*, in that the French term can be applied to the depths of the ocean as well as the underbelly of the city.<sup>70</sup> History thus becomes ‘the *site* of Gothic terror, a *place* of possibility and credulity [...] not [...] a source of information or something to understand but [...] a *place* of horror and savagery’ (De Groot 2010: 15 and 16, my emphases).<sup>71</sup>

The following episode is a good example of how *le vieux Paris* is transformed into a distinctive site of secret doorways, guttered lamps, maniacal laughter and terrifying darkness:

Viviane posa [...] l’extrémité de son doigt sur la table où reposait la lampe, et au même instant deux portes s’ouvrirent dans la cloison, de deux côtés différents.

Rustique poussa un cri, et voulut se précipiter vers l’une de ces issues ; mais comme il allait l’atteindre, un éclat de rire strident et moqueur se fit entendre à ses côtés, les portes se refermèrent, Viviane disparut, et la lampe s’éteignit.

Il se trouvait seul, au milieu d’une obscurité impénétrable... (VIEUX II: 119)

Rustique’s terror is physical, because he is a geographical foreigner, a provincial in Paris, but his fear is analogous to that of the time traveller, or reader, reminding us of Walpole’s tactic of placing contemporary characters in feudal settings (De Groot 2010: 14-5).

It is because *le vieux Paris* emerges as a distinct and distinctive place, with commensurate spatial and physical accoutrements, rather than an abstract period of time, that the protagonists are able to leave a horror-filled past behind them simply by leaving the capital:

<sup>70</sup> See also my discussion of Zaccone’s *Pieuvres de Paris* in IV.3 above.

<sup>71</sup> On ‘the past as a place of privation that might be escaped, [...] a place of poverty, fear, drunkenness, neglect, illegitimacy and dirt’ in Catherine Cookson, see De Groot (2010: 55). On the map as a metonym for History in Cornwell, see De Groot (2010: 84). On Manzoni’s comparison of ‘l’Histoire à une carte de géographie, le roman historique à une carte topographique’, see Bernard (1996: 105).

Marcelle avait été unie, la veille, à Rustique et ils allaient tous les deux chercher, loin de la capitale, un doux nid pour leurs amours...

Le rêve de Marcelle !

Une vallée harmonieuse et solitaire, où ils pourraient vivre heureux l'un par l'autre, loin de tout danger, loin surtout des objets qui leur rappelaient un passé plein d'horreur. (VIEUX III: 315-6)

Like Marcelle, Rustique is able to look upon *le vieux Paris* from a safe vantage point, which appears to be not only outside the city but also outside its menacing temporality:

C'était une petite éminence d'où le regard pouvait embrasser encore la capitale... Rustique s'était approché de Marcelle, il étendit les bras vers ce *vieux Paris*, où tant d'événements divers l'avaient agité, et il resta un moment absorbé dans cette muette contemplation.

Quelques mois de séjour dans cette ville étrange avaient suffi pour lui inspirer la répulsion la plus profonde : cette capitale qu'il avait tant ambitionné de voir, il la quittait maintenant sans regret... (VIEUX III: 316-7)

This is in stark contrast to the situation of Fleur-de-Marie in *Les Mystères de Paris* who, even removed to Gerolstein, and from there, in turn, to the Abbaye de Sainte-Hermangilde, is unable to escape the demons of her past and so dies of her shame and anguish:

Rien ne peut anéantir ces affreux souvenirs... Sans cesse ils me poursuivent, non plus comme autrefois au milieu des paisibles habitants d'une ferme, ou des femmes dégradées, mes compagnes de Saint-Lazare... mais ils me poursuivront jusque dans ce palais, peuplé de l'élite de l'Allemagne... Ils me poursuivent enfin jusque dans les bras de mon père, jusque sur les marches de son trône. (MP: 1282)

Zaccone's text thus seems to prefigure later novels, and in particular science fiction such as H.G. Wells's *Time Machine*, and, indeed, Lermina's *Mystère-ville*, which undermine history and destabilize its linearity via a representation of 'the past as something which is traversable, rather than inescapable' (De Groot 2010: 44).

‘Encore du Moyen Âge ! Toujours du Moyen Âge ! Qui me délivrera du Moyen Âge [...] ?’ grumbled Théophile Gautier (Durand-Le Guern 2000: 82). By setting his *mystères* in the Renaissance, Zaccone clearly sought to differentiate himself from the writers who returned time and again to the tiresome clichés of the Middle Ages, while continuing to exploit the nineteenth-century fascination with distant pasts.

The text is a clear departure from Sue’s conception of history:

À partir des années 1850, [le] public qui s’uniformise attend moins d’être exalté ou dépaysé que rassuré, et le roman populaire s’assagit, soutient l’ordre établi, et cultive le *happy ending*. Plus de vision mythique du peuple comme chez Sue, plus de justice sacralisée, mais des querelles d’intérêt, de l’amour larmoyant, et pour finir un bonheur conformiste. Tout un pan du roman historique des dernières décennies du siècle se ressent de cette tendance. (Bernard 1996: 54)

And yet it is characterized by a wry self-consciousness which this *happy ending* perhaps belies, stemming from the sheer number of palimpsests at work in the text and the frequent opportunities to compare these. The reader is invited to recognize techniques, such as the *récit du passé* and themes, such as death and resuscitation, in both *Histoire* and *histoire*, and this repetition results in a typically modernist foregrounding of the way in which the text functions. Gothic clichés are used to facilitate an understanding of *time* in terms of *place*, prefiguring a complex interaction that would persist in the twentieth-century novel.





### V.3 – FUTURE PERFECT?: UTOPIA

Jules Lermina's *Mystère-ville* was published as a seventeen-part serial in the *Journal des Voyages*, from 4 December 1904 to 26 March 1905, under the pseudonym of William Cobb. The text is a futuristic utopia, based around the exile of some forty thousand Protestants, including Denis Papin, an inventor best known for his inventions using steam power, following Louis XIV's 1685 revocation of the 1598 Edict of Nantes.<sup>72</sup>

The links between utopia and science fiction are widely acknowledged. James describes utopia as a subgenre of science fiction (1995: 27), and Suvin qualifies it, more specifically, as a socio-political science fiction (1977: 69). De Groot is one of a number of critics to recognize the similarities between the science fiction genre and that of the historical novel:

An historical novel is always a slightly more inflected form than most other types of fiction, the reader of such a work slightly more self-aware of the artificiality of the writing and the strangeness of engaging with imaginary work which strives to explain something that is other than one's contemporary knowledge and experience: the past. In this a cognate genre is science fiction, which involves a conscious interaction with a clearly unfamiliar set of landscapes, technologies and circumstances. As Darko Survin argues, SF is 'a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition.' (2010: 4-5)<sup>73</sup>

In this respect, we would expect to find many of the same strategies at work in *Mystère-ville* as we do in *Les Mystères du vieux Paris*. The temporal exotic renews and revitalizes, and thus preserves, the exoticism found in the hypotext. And yet the self-awareness inherent to these exotic interactions, the reader's willingness to play

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<sup>72</sup> A comprehensive account of the text's genesis is given in Brian Stableford's well-researched introduction to the English translation (2010).

<sup>73</sup> De Groot refers to Suvin as cited and discussed in Roberts 2005:7.

his part in the game despite his acknowledgement of its artificiality, as we have already seen with Zaccone's text, adds a layer to the palimpsest which is not only distinctly new, but self-consciously so.

According to Nellist, utopian fiction translates 'a common anxiety about the future' (1995: 135) and in *fin-de-siècle* Paris, fears relating to urban development were at the very core of this anxiety. This was a period of rapid technological change, in the form of inventions such as steam and electricity, with inevitable social implications,<sup>74</sup> coupled with an acute *fin-de-siècle* awareness of the end of an era and the advent of a new one (James 1995: 37-8). As Seed explains, the privileged setting for technological change, and for the ambiguous mix of promise and disquiet which accompanied it, was the metropolis (1995: xv).

The fascination with the city of the future already had a long history in French literature, prior to Lermina's *Mystère-ville*. Stableford mentions a number of futuristic utopian satires 'in which refugees from modern Paris are enabled to visit advanced alternative versions of the city' (2010: 14), including Louis-Sébastien Mercier's *L'an deux mille quatre cent quarante. Rêve s'il en fût jamais* (1771) and Émile Souvestre's *Le monde tel qu'il sera* (1846) and also notes that *Mystère-Ville* appeared just before Anatole France's significant communist utopia novel, *Sur la pierre blanche* (1905). Although Stableford believes Lermina is unlikely to have read any comparable English novels, with the possible exception of William Morris's *News from Nowhere* (1890), these were also numerous<sup>75</sup> and as such indicative of the considerable contemporary resonance such fiction was felt to have.

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<sup>74</sup> On this phenomenon in Victorian society and English literature, see Seed 1995: xiv and James 1995: 38.

<sup>75</sup> See, among others, Bulwer-Lytton's *The Coming Race* (1871), Chesney's *The Battle of Dorking* (1871) and Richard Jefferies's *After London* (1885).

Before attempting any sort of comparison between Sue's text and that of Lermina, it is important to acknowledge that utopian elements in Sue's *Mystères de Paris* are relatively isolated. As Bory remarks:

Les tendances socialistes ou humanitaires n'apparaissent que vers la troisième partie – publiée en feuilleton du 1<sup>er</sup> au 17 novembre 1842 – avec la description de la ferme modèle de Bouqueval. Sue ne prendra vraiment conscience de sa « mission » que vers la cinquième partie, lorsque les réflexions deviennent tirades, que l'auteur s'en prend au lecteur timoré ou à « l'égoïste gorgé d'or ». (1962: 250)

By his own admission, Sue, rather than having a fixed plan or agenda, let his novel evolve, both diegetically and ideologically, as he wrote:

Sue, écrivant les premières lignes de cet ouvrage ne [sait] ni où il va, ni ce qu'il souhaite faire ; [il n'a] aucune idée de la valeur de ce qu'il découvre, alors qu'il est en train d'écrire, comme en témoigne sa lettre à Legouvé. "Mon bon Ernest, je vous envoie je ne sais quoi. Lisez, c'est peut-être bête comme un chou".<sup>76</sup> (Bozzetto 1998: 36)

Sue occasionally acknowledged the fanciful, implausible nature of his proposals ('Mais oublions ces utopies, folles, absurdes, stupides, impraticables, comme de véritables utopies qu'elles sont' (MP: 648)) but was more frequently serious, insistent and expansive in setting out his ideas.

While the ideas that did eventually emerge from Sue's novel appear to correspond to what Khouri describes as a 'corrective utopia' (1983: 177), proposing ways in which society could be improved in the future, Lermina's text, in contrast, is an example of the 'lost-race utopia'.<sup>77</sup> As James explains, '[a] 'lost race' properly

<sup>76</sup> Bozzetto's citation is from Bory (1962: 244).

<sup>77</sup> See James 1995 and Khouri 1983. James's survey of lost-race tales is restricted to British and American texts, in which, he claims, lost races are 'usually to be found in Africa or Latin America' (1995: 31). My French text, which features a lost race discovered in the Gobi desert, is therefore a particularly interesting case study. The numerous imaginative technological innovations detailed in the text also make it quite unique, if we are to believe James's assertion that: 'there is a latent 'what

defined is a group of people who once had contact with our own historical past, but have since moved geographically and developed isolated from western Europe until their rediscovery in the nineteenth century' (1995: 32).<sup>78</sup>

The future thus provides a pretext for re-examining and rewriting the past. As Seed remarks, 'utopian and futuristic science fiction repeatedly looks forward so as to look back' (1995: xiii).<sup>79</sup> We are dealing with alternative, secret or lost versions of history rather than the future per se (Khouri 1983: 17; Suvin 1977: 66). Lermina's novel thus describes 'a historical residue outside the chronology of events' (Khouri 1983: 172). The particular relevance of alternative history stories like *Mystère-ville* to our study of palimpsests is neatly summed up by Nellist in his analysis of Chesney's *The Battle of Dorking*: 'The narrative advantage of describing a future as an imagined past lies in the capacity to recover the present as a perplexing palimpsest of the unfamiliar imposed on the recognizable' (1995: 120).

A common fascination with what 'could have been' links both the utopia, characterized by virtual histories, and the palimpsest, characterized by virtual narratives. As Suvin puts it, with regard to science fiction and utopia: 'Le mode verbal du « comme si » est le subjonctif. Comme l'utopie, la S.F. est un organe d'exploration fondé sur les « possibilités latérales » de refaire l'histoire' (1977: 72).

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if?' in the lost race story [...] But very few lost race stories actually explore this question, says Suvin [1983]), and *very few offer any kind of novum*' (1995: 31-2, my emphasis).

<sup>78</sup> As James points out, 'this category merges imperceptibly into those stories of imaginary races who have no contact at all with the history that we have known, such as the peoples whom numerous Victorian stories depict as living within a hollow Earth, or, indeed, those peoples who inhabit Mars or Venus. Fascination with the Other is one of the basic sources of the science fiction imagination, and the traditional 'lost race' story may satisfy that fascination as well as stories of interplanetary travel' (1995: 33). On equivalent French titles, see Costes and Altairac (2006).

<sup>79</sup> As Nellist observes, the derivation of the future from the past has a biblical precedent, reminding us of the religious mysteries evoked in II.1 above: 'The model for the derivation of future from the past by secret, but at least retrospectively comprehensible, ways had been the relation of New to Old Testaments' (1995: 113).

Dillon, drawing on the relation Kristeva elaborates between the geno-text and pheno-text,<sup>80</sup> makes very similar remarks about the palimpsest, explaining that:

the geno-text corresponds to the infinite possibilities of palimpsestuous textuality, the pheno-text to the ‘singular’ text which is marked by and cut through by those possibilities, and which bears the trace of the virtual entities that it *could have been*. (2007: 87, emphasis in original)<sup>81</sup>

My investigation of the differences and similarities between *Les Mystères de Paris* and *Mystère-ville* and my examination of the multiple palimpsests at work in the latter text will concentrate in particular on the notion of time as place, the differences between Sue’s Bouqueval community and its equivalent in Lermina’s *Mystère-ville*, the use of the trope of inversion in the two texts,<sup>82</sup> and references to sensory experience of the city, particularly with regard to methods of punishment.

### **Fleshing out the future**

As I have already demonstrated in my analysis of Zaccone’s *Mystères du vieux Paris*, the parameters of time and space can be difficult to differentiate in historical novels, and Seed (1995) notes a similar interaction between the two in science fiction.<sup>83</sup> The way in which James refers to the ‘science fiction *landscape*’ (1995: 26, my emphasis) and pursues the geographical analogy to introduce his subject<sup>84</sup> echoes Wilde’s famous description of utopia as ‘the one country at which Humanity is

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<sup>80</sup> See also IV.3 above.

<sup>81</sup> See also Dillon’s reiteration of this point with reference to McEwan’s *Atonement*: ‘*Atonement* (1999) is just one of a whole host of other possible narratives that bears the mark of the virtual narratives which have not been realized in its place but which *could have been*’ (2007: 95).

<sup>82</sup> The use of this trope is particularly interesting, given its importance in Decadent fiction, such as Huysmans’s *À rebours* (1884).

<sup>83</sup> Seed writes: ‘the twin parameters of space and time [...] play a crucial role in articulating the speculative thrust of this fiction’ and ‘[i]f space is one major parameter of science fiction, time has occupied at least as prominent a place in this mode’ (1995: x and xiii).

<sup>84</sup> ‘Nineteenth-century science fiction is mountainous territory which still remains to some extent impenetrable and uncharted. The obvious high points are well-known: it is easy enough to map a mountain range from the air by noting those peaks which emerge from the clouds’ (1995: 26).

always landing' (1891). And yet Suvin stresses the importance of the temporal dimension of utopia, explaining that '[l']utopie] se distingue des genres mythiques tels que le fantastique et le merveilleux, qui se déroulent hors de l'histoire' (1977: 66). Both science fiction and utopia 'pouss[ent] au bord de la rivière du temps et de l'histoire' (1977: 72). I will now consider the significance of this interaction between time and space in Sue's *Mystères de Paris* and Lermina's *Mystère-ville*.

In *Les Mystères de Paris*, the fact that Rodolphe's utopian community is established in the pastoral setting of Bouqueval is certainly significant. Bouqueval's alternative social organization, characterized by community, collaboration and abundance, in stark contrast to the anonymity, criminal individualism and want of Paris, is highlighted by the fact that Bouqueval is geographically removed from the capital. The connotations of the pastoral setting lend a chronotopic dimension, which serves to discredit, albeit implicitly and fleetingly, Sue's utopian vision: in a world where progress is associated with urban life, Sue's pastoral utopia is unwieldy, anachronistic, a contradiction in terms. Tortillard's cynicism, which offsets the Maître d'école's naïve enthusiasm, as Bouqueval is described to the latter and he wonders whether he would qualify for shelter and alms, hints at this flaw: 'Le fils de Bras-Rouge avait des penchants très peu rustiques et l'esprit très peu tourné à la bucolique [...] : il voulait donc rappeler à la réalité le brigand, qui s'égarait déjà parmi de champêtres et riantes illusions' (MP: 339, my emphasis).

This chronotopicity is taken much further in *Mystère-ville*. Nellist explains that utopia in the nineteenth century went 'from being a remote place but contemporary with the visitor to being a familiar place but in the writer's future, near or far' (1995: 111), and this shift is reflected in Lermina's text, which opens with first-person narrator Alcide Trémalet explaining how, having travelled constantly

since the death of his parents, he has grown increasingly disillusioned with and indifferent to ‘exoticism’. The spatial exotic appears tired, spent and clichéd (Appendix VIII.5.11).

The fact that Lermina presents his story as a geographical journey, referring to Mystère-ville as the ‘Paris d’Orient’, in spite of this ennui, is, according to Stableford, simply a means of conferring a degree of realism:

In displacing his own alternative Paris geographically, rather than temporally, Lermina was merely taking advantage of Bulwer’s [1871] template to avoid the seeming necessity that condemned futuristic visions to the status of mere dreams [...]. (2010: 15)

The setting in the middle of the Gobi desert provides a pretext (namely the 1900 ‘Boxer rebellion’ against European colonialists in China) for the knock to the head that will grant the narrator access to Mystère-ville’s alternative past.<sup>85</sup> But the geographical setting is otherwise quite arbitrary in that it is of little consequence in terms of the nature of the utopia itself. Our interest is less in the Huguenots’ physical separation from their homeland than in the temporal divide this has engendered, reflected in another name given to the city: ‘Nouveau Paris’. The whole city, rather than a section of it, is therefore a kind of temporal *bas-fonds*, inhabited by religious exiles rather than working-class paupers or criminals.<sup>86</sup> We are dealing with a historical lacuna (Seed 1995: xiii), an alternative Paris, whose material characteristics are only there to underline this warped temporality. *Mystère-ville* is an intriguing palimpsest of Paris, which mixes elements of the real city the exiles once

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<sup>85</sup> The temporal, rather than geographical, nature of the journey is especially obvious to the modern reader, for whom the blow to the head is an unmistakable feature of the time travel narrative: ‘Getting into the past is a feat imaginatively achieved in myriad ways – drugs, dreams, knocks on the head, pacts with the devil, lightning bolts, thunder claps, and, since H.G. Wells, time machines’ (Lowenthal 1985: 20).

<sup>86</sup> Notably, the French term ‘proscrit’ means both ‘outlaw’ and ‘exile’, and thus encompasses both types of ‘otherness’ (Collins Robert French Dictionary, fifth edition).

knew with technological developments specific to their isolated community, even though, as we shall see, these are often significantly and ironically reminiscent of the turn-of-the-century capital. Khouri refers to a ‘jarring autonomy of details, the non-contemporaneity of objects [...] a museum conglomerate of items shorn of their historical sense’ (1983: 177) and to a ‘syncretic interfusion of images of pre-technical paganism and of advanced technology’ (1983: 184). Examples of this temporal mélange abound in *Mystère-ville*. One example running through the text is the method of transport in the city. The flying baskets are a clear nod to the future, in that aeroplane design and testing was at its peak in the early twentieth century, and yet the fact that the baskets are transported by vultures, rather than engines or propellers, lends a distinctly gothic note. Another good example is the set of apparently old-fashioned clothes given to the narrator on his arrival:

Je trouvai au pied de mon lit un vêtement neuf dont j’eus tout loisir d’étudier la confection. La forme en était un peu surannée. J’avais le pourpoint, le haut-de-chausse, les bas à la façon d’un clerc de la montagne Sainte-Geneviève. (MVILLE: 206)

For all their quaintness, these clothes are actually at the cutting edge of technology, in that they are made from textiles which are ‘minéro-métalliques’, created via an advanced fabrication process using ground minerals (MVILLE: 206).

Geographical and geological imagery also has an allegorical, historical or political, resonance. The motif of the desert, as Benjamin reminds us, with reference to *Paris désert: Lamentations d’un Jérémie haussmannisé* (1868) evokes desolation, loneliness and bleakness (1999: 129). Similarly, the volcanic eruption which is supposed to have created huge basalt mountains, separating the exiles from the rest of civilization, is a well-worn symbol of historical tumult. As Benjamin puts it, ‘Paris is a counterpart in the social order to what Vesuvius is in the geographic order:



a menacing, hazardous massif, an ever-active hotbed of revolution' (1999: 83). Natural catastrophes also serve to flag up, and prepare the reader for, temporal changes which may otherwise go unnoticed. As Seed puts it: 'change occurs so gradually that the registering consciousness needs a rapid transition into the future in order to identify the transformations that have taken place' (1995: xiv). The volcano must therefore be seen as a symbol of temporal rupture.

Even more specifically, in terms of the focus of my study, geological imagery underlines the palimpsestuous nature of history.<sup>87</sup> History in *Mystère-ville* is thus characterized by erasures, such as the complete ignorance of the French Revolution among the city's inhabitants (MVILLE: 47). Dillon notes the similarities between palimpsesting and apocalypse, both of which are 'processes of partial destruction' (2007: 79). The partiality of destruction implies an element of preservation, and this preservation, or survival, as Dillon explains, is an inherently palimpsestuous concept: 'Literature is that which "lives on", *sur-vivre*, and that which lives *on* other texts, those written, and those yet to come' (Dillon 2007: 80, emphases in original).<sup>88</sup> The parallel between the palimpsest and the apocalyptic dénouement is made clear in Lermina's novel. The end of *Mystère-ville* is as much about the survival of the narrator's text as about the fate of the city and its community: 'Ah ! j'emporte mes notes !' exclaims the narrator as he flies away from *Mystère-ville*, and the final part of the text provides the details of the discovery of the supposed *manuscrit trouvé* we have just read (MVILLE: 303).

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<sup>87</sup> On history as a collection of palimpsestuous documents, see Foucault 1996 (quoted by Dillon 2007: 7).

<sup>88</sup> See also Derrida 1984 and 2003 (111-203).

History in *Mystère-ville* is also about additions, as in Alcide's romanticized lectures to the inhabitants of *Mystère-ville* on the history of Paris (MVILLE: 283) and revisions, as we see in Morel's<sup>89</sup> rival lecture series:

M. Henri Morel – obéissant à des sentiments d'une basse jalousie – avait institué de son côté des cours contradictoires aux miens, dans lesquels il s'érigait en critique, plus que malveillant, de la civilisation dont je traçais un si magnifique tableau, nous traitant de barbares, opposant à notre vie si intense et si combative les placidités molles de sa ville close. (MVILLE: 283)

This echoes, in turn, the palimpsestuous nature of the writing process, described by Davidson (quoted by Dillon 2007: 47) as 'the gradual accretion and sedimentation of textual materials, no layer of which can be isolated from any other' (1989: 79). Genette uses a similar geological analogy to evoke the ongoing potential for literary change and transformation, comparing dormant genres to volcanoes: 'il en est sans doute des genres comme des volcans, dont on peut parfois dater la première éruption, mais jamais la dernière: longtemps endormis, mais peut-être jamais définitivement éteints' (1982: 80).

The metafictional connotations of geological imagery are therefore indisputable. Similarly, we are presented with the idea that time travel may endanger the temporal fabric:

Like historic restoration, time travel tends to make the past thin and artificial, Fritz Leiber surmises, and may one day wear it out altogether; the fabric of history can withstand only so much change. 'Every operation leaves reality a bit cruder, a bit uglier, a bit more makeshift, and a whole lot less rich in those details and feelings that are our heritage.' (Lowenthal 1985: 31)<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> The name is perhaps another veiled nod to Sue's text, as Morel is also the name of Rodolphe's destitute neighbour, who lives with his family in the attic of the rue du Temple.

<sup>90</sup> Lowenthal cites Leiber (1965: 63).

This, coupled with the equivalence posited between *Histoire* and *histoire*, suggests that rewriting may be an equally dangerous practice, liable to weaken and confuse a hypotext, rather than aid our understanding of it.

Much like *Les Mystères du vieux Paris*, then, *Mystère-ville* is characterized by the repeated suggestion of parallels between *Histoire* and *histoire*. Our attention is drawn not only to the notion of History, presented in deliberately evocative, geographical terms, but also, by implication, to the text itself. I will now turn to the details of the respective utopian communities and consider how Sue's utopian ideas are overwritten (in both senses of the word: either preserved or destroyed) by Lermina's novel.

### **Bouqueval vs. Mystère-ville**

Sue's philanthropic utopian community, the 'ferme modèle' of Bouqueval, is presented by le père Châtelain when the Maître d'école and Tortillard seek shelter there for the night. The farm employs starving and jobless but honest citizens, and offers suitable work to women and children as well as men (MP: 338). Seven workers do the work of twice as many men, but are paid accordingly, with labourers receiving 150 écus per year, milkmaids and female farmhands receiving 60 écus, and all sharing a fifth of the farm's produce between them (MP: 336). The workers can stay for two years and can reapply after five. This provides everyone in the area with an incentive to work hard, as well as an assurance of work when they leave (MP: 342-3).

Mystère-ville has a very similar organization, in that everyone must undertake manual work which, when divided up, amounts to only a few hours a day per person. As at Bouqueval, the elderly, women and children all work (MVILLE:

207). Machines, rather than absolving humans of the need to work have, along with the erosion of class distinctions, served to illustrate that physical and mental types of work are equally valuable.<sup>91</sup> All the labourers, much to the narrator's amusement, are therefore also artists and writers (MVILLE: 206), an image which is perhaps a satirical nod to the increasing commercialization of the arts, and what Sainte-Beuve had famously called 'la littérature industrielle' (1839).

The main difference between the two conceptions of utopia can be found in the criticism they received. *Les Mystères de Paris* famously invoked the wrath of Marx, in his collection of essays entitled 'The Holy Family' (1845),<sup>92</sup> which balked at the mysteries Sue purported to reveal, picked practical holes in his supposedly visionary proposals and pulled apart the shaky political ideology underpinning them, summing the novel up as being among '[t]he most pitiful off-scourings of socialist literature'. Marx was systematic and scathing in his criticism of the Bouqueval model, dismantling Sue's claims regarding what the workers were paid and how much they ate as entirely implausible in light of the total annual income produced by France and the total number of inhabitants employed in agriculture, and pointing out that, were Sue's model to be adopted, '[t]he agricultural population alone would consume more meat than is produced in France'. He reached the fittingly acerbic conclusions that 'the most generally known *economic relations* are still mysteries for Monsieur Sue' (emphasis in original) and that '[t]he Bouqueval model farm is nothing but a fantastic illusion; its hidden fund is not the natural land of the Bouqueval estate, it is a magic purse of Fortunatus that Rudolph has!'

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<sup>91</sup> Nellist (1995: 131-2) notes a very similar phenomenon in Morris's *News from Nowhere*.

<sup>92</sup> The essays were directed against his friend Dr Bruno Bauer, a university lecturer and Liberal theologian, and one of the pioneers of higher criticism, and included an extended criticism of Szeliga's article 'Eugène Sue: Die Geheimnisse von Paris'.

Bozzetto, while seconding Marx's criticisms of Bouqueval (1998: 38), also urges caution and sees a degree of self-criticism in Sue:

il serait absurde d'interpréter l'échec de Rodolphe comme celui du romancier : le héros n'est qu'un moyen ; la mise en scène de son échec, en problématisant les données, permet à Sue d'éviter deux écueils. Celui de la fade utopie, celui de la fascination par l'exotisme des bas-fonds. Cet échec du héros permet de critiquer la volonté d'idéaliser ; il rend nécessaire une rhétorique du compromis, du biais, un recours au regard fantastique, afin de permettre que l'innommé, le monde des "classes laborieuses" puisse être représenté, même si cela ne se fait encore que dans une lumière sulfureuse. (1998: 39)

Lermina's text is considerably more self-aware, and includes a number of narrative and diegetic acknowledgements of the utopia's weaknesses, which culminate in the city's ultimate, spectacular destruction. The narrator is a foppish gentleman of leisure, living off 'des rentes' (MVILLE: 206), rather like Rodolphe, and indeed Sue himself. Although he claims to be keen to enter into the spirit of the community and to contribute through work, his loyalties are called into question as the novel progresses. While his wife is increasingly militant, throwing herself behind the cause of the *aromistes*, who want to use aromatic power to make contact with the outside world, Alcide sits on the fence as chaos and apocalypse descend on *Mystère-ville* and, significantly, the final concerns he expresses, the final words of his text, are for himself and his wife, and not the wider community: 'Isabelle, ma douce Isabelle, arriverons-nous jamais au Bois de Boulogne ?' (MVILLE: 302).

According to Khouri, this is typical of the lost-race utopia, the hero of which:

often ends up opposing his individual values against those of the utopia in which he seeks his own rewards. The logic of utopian community comes to be measured not against the logic of another society, but against the logic of an individual. In this configuration, the social can only appear as repressive. (1983: 183)<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> On the agency of groups versus that of individuals in the *mystères*, see also IV.2 above.

The community as a whole is characterized by a similar ‘exclusiveness’, which the conservative, isolationist *phonistes* (proponents of sonic power) in particular seek to preserve, and which is summed up by *l’Accusateur* when Alcide stands trial after arriving uninvited in the city: ‘nous habitons Mystère-ville, et il faut qu’à jamais le mystère continue à nous envelopper...’ (MVILLE: 82).

The mystery which defines the utopia therefore also serves to invalidate it. In Khouri’s words:

the source of fascination with the sequestered utopia makes it valueless as a model. This type of utopia is private. It is only for the few, and is therefore not to be taken as a political model but to be coveted. Indeed, the lost-race utopia is founded upon an axiological distinction between political relevance and privilege. (1983: 180)

The precarious nature of the utopia played out in the diegesis is echoed at narrative level, via repeated suggestions of Alcide’s unreliability as narrator (Stableford 2010: 7). Doubts are therefore raised both as to the legitimacy of the text and the validity of the utopia it describes. The narrator, from his very first words, insists, rather too assiduously, on his reliability, so that the reader is alerted to the possibility of refuting his overly emphatic claims from the start of the novel:

J’écris ces notes au jour le jour. [...]

Ce manuscrit tombera-t-il jamais sous les yeux de quelqu’un de mes anciens compagnons ? je l’ignore. C’est, en somme, pour mon usage personnel que je le rédige, comme pour me convaincre moi-même de la réalité des faits extraordinaires que j’y mentionne.

Je connais l’incrédulité humaine : si quelque Européen, quelque Parisien lisait ces lignes, il taxerait de mensonges les observations, les réalités qui s’y trouvent consignées : et pourtant il n’est pas ici un seul mot qui ne soit l’expression de la pure vérité. (MVILLE: 3)

His claim to be writing ‘au jour le jour’ appears to be contradicted by a number of remarks characterized by a temporality which exposes them as later additions to the text, for example when Alcide first meets Isabelle, his designated executioner: ‘Avec une hardiesse dont je ne me serais pas cru capable, j’appelai moi-même mon jeune bourreau – *qui se nommait, je le sus bientôt, Isabelle Duval*, – et, l’oiseau ayant étendu ses ailes, nous descendîmes doucement vers la ville...’ (MVILLE: 140, my emphasis).

Similarly, he shows a telling awareness of the text as a whole, and a knowledge of what will come next, which are clearly indicative of a retrospective process of editing and revision:

*Comme on va le voir*, partis du même point que nous, alors que les sciences positives, mécaniques, chimiques et physiques étaient encore à l’état rudimentaire, ils ont aiguillé dans une direction différente que celle que nous avons suivie, tant au point de vue de la vie matérielle que de l’organisation sociale. (MVILLE: 149, my emphasis)

Equally, his denial of writing for any reason other than personal is somewhat at odds with the later appeal: ‘Je prie le lecteur de se remémorer rapidement les faits précédents’, as it is with the declaration : ‘*Je tiens à faire partager à ceux qui liront ces lignes* l’émotion profonde qu’elle me causa’ (MVILLE: 46 and 119, my emphasis).

The overzealous denials of partiality persist right to the end of the novel, where Jean Lévêque, proposing a committee of enquiry as to the nature of the outside world, and a plebiscite, rather than taking the side of the *aromistes* or *phonistes*, supposedly sings Alcide’s praises. The narrator’s parenthetical commentary is typically suspicious:

il se présentait une occasion unique, inespérée d'obtenir des renseignements précis [sur le monde extérieur] : c'était la présence d'un habitant de cet univers inconnu, de ce jeune étranger, *Alcide Trémalet, si franc, si sympathique... (c'est Jean qui parle)*, et auquel on demanderait d'exposer dans une série de conférences l'état industriel, social, intellectuel de ces régions mystérieuses... (MVILLE: 282, my emphasis)

Far from being the disinterested diarist he would have us believe, Alcide has literary aspirations which are made evident on a number of occasions.<sup>94</sup> The lectures he gives to the Mystère-ville community on the history of Paris bring his storytelling prowess to the fore:

Quel tableau splendide que celui de nos civilisations, se développant à travers des catastrophes sans nombre ! Les guerres surtout passionnaient mon public ; avec quel brio je racontais les campagnes de Louis XIV, les triomphes des armées républicaines, l'épopée napoléonienne... marche triomphale qui joncha de cadavres toutes les routes de l'Europe ! Quand je dis les épouvantes de la Bérésina, ce fut du délire. (MVILLE: 283)

He even makes an explicit reference to a writing project he envisages:

Je ne sais si c'était ce travail manuel qui agissait sur mon cerveau, mais jamais je ne m'étais senti doué d'une perception plus vive, d'une imagination plus active. Mon esprit se libérait, s'élevait. En moi naissait le désir d'exécuter quelque œuvre utile, je concevais le plan d'un ouvrage où je comparerais le Paris de Gobi au Paris français... (MVILLE: 227)

As well as recognizing the palimpsestuous nature of Mystère-ville, Alcide, initially alarmed by Durand's mention of the 'griffe aromale' (the 'aromal claw', a kind of crane, powered by aroma) also comes to appreciate that language itself is palimpsestuous. As Jean Lefèvre explains to him:

Vous n'hésitez pas, n'est-il pas vrai ? si l'un de nous s'égareait dans le Paris dont vous êtes fier, à le confier à vos engins...

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<sup>94</sup> Dillon (2007: 93) makes the same point about Briony in Ian McEwan's *Atonement*.



– Certes ! et ce me serait une véritable joie que de vous apprendre l’emploi de la vapeur, de l’électricité, des chemins de fer, du télégraphe, du téléphone... du Métropolitain ! Oh ! le Métropolitain !

– *Tous mots qui sonnent barbaquement à nos oreilles et qui, je vous en crois sur parole, cachent des merveilles.* (MVILLE: 195, my emphasis)

The enthusiastic response which Alcide’s lectures receive from women in particular is a clear reference to the predominantly female readership of popular fiction,<sup>95</sup> thus drawing parallels between the *Histoire* he recounts and the *histoire* being told by Lermina:

Ce fut surtout auprès des femmes que ma propagande obtint les plus beaux résultats.

J’avais trouvé des accents lyriques pour leur peindre les merveilles de nos grandes capitales, au premier rang desquelles je plaçais naturellement notre Paris, et à travers un mirage lointain, je les promenais sur nos boulevards, nos avenues, nos Champs-Élysées, notre Bois de Boulogne. Elles se voyaient nonchalamment couchées dans une voiture, attelée d’un cheval de prix, emmitouflées de soies et souriant aux cavaliers de marque. (MVILLE: 283)

In this way, Alcide can be read as an avatar of Lermina himself.

Unlike Sue’s Bouqueval, whose naïve exposition attracted criticism from external parties, *Mystère-ville* is a knowing and self-critical utopia. By foregrounding the writing activities of the main character, Lermina reinforces our impression that mystery is not merely a diegetic phenomenon. Indeed, perhaps the most intriguing mysteries are those of the text itself, and the story of its elaboration. I will now turn to the diegetic content of the texts, and specifically to the discussion and depiction of crime and punishment.

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<sup>95</sup> On female readers, see also IV.3 above.

### **Inversion: repetition and innovation**

The Bouqueval model is linked to Sue's idea of *justice vertueuse*, whereby the good are rewarded just as the wicked are punished, as a 'contre-poids' to the prospect of the death penalty (MP: 647). Le père Châtelain is keen to highlight the difference between Bouqueval and rehabilitative communities set up exclusively for young criminals (Appendix VIII.5.12).

Unsurprisingly, Marx was unconvinced by the idea of *justice vertueuse*, arguing that if society were to reward the good, this would amount to a usurpation of divine justice by human justice. He also refuted the originality of the notion, noting its similarity to ideas expounded by Bentham in *Théorie des peines et des recompenses* (*Punishments and Rewards*, 1811), as well as to a number of prizes and schemes already in existence:

Sue has [...] forgotten the "*Virtue Prize*" which is awarded every year in Paris and which he himself mentions. This prize is even organised in duplicate: the material *prix Montyon* for noble acts of men and women, and the *prix rosière* for girls of highest morality. [...]

As far as *espionnage de vertu* and the *surveillance de haute charité morale* are concerned, they were organised long ago by the Jesuits. Moreover, the *Journal des Débats*, *Siècle*, *Petites affiches de Paris*, etc., point out and proclaim the virtues, noble acts and merits of all the Paris stockjobbers daily and at cost price not counting the pointing out and proclamation of political noble acts, for which each party has its own organ. (Marx 1845)

Marx also notes the extent to which Sue's reward code is calqued on the penal code to which it is supposed to stand in contrast, summarizing in his 'Table of Critically Complete Justice' the equivalent entities of sword and crown; *mouchards* and *espions de vertu*; *assises du crime* and *assises de la vertu*. Dentith (1990 and 1995) refers to this as the 'negative pragmatics' of utopian writing:

From a formal point of view, utopian writing is only comprehensible by means of its constant reference to the contemporary world; the imaginary is only imaginable by reference to the actual. I have described this elsewhere as the ‘negative pragmatics’ of utopian writing; such writing situates itself by means of its constant allusions to the world from which the utopians have escaped, and the writing takes its force from the negative contrast from that world. (1995: 138-9)

As such, Sue’s virtuous justice, an understanding of which is dependent on our knowledge of the criminal justice system on which it is modelled and onto which it is grafted, has clear utopian pretensions. The ‘negative pragmatics’ is underlined stylistically via a series of antithetical pairings:

Le peuple voit bien une justice criminelle (*sic*), composée d’homme fermes, intègres, éclairés, toujours occupé à rechercher, à découvrir, à punir les scélérats.

Il ne voit pas de justice vertueuse, composée d’hommes fermes, intègres, éclairés, toujours occupé à rechercher, à récompenser les gens de bien.

Tout lui dit : « Tremble !... »

Rien ne lui dit : « Espère !... »

Tout le menace...

Rien ne le console. (MP: 645-6)

And yet the ‘negative pragmatics’ of utopian writing has its limitations. Inversion hinges on repetition rather than reinvention, and so categories are rearranged, but rarely transformed (Dentith 1995: 143-4). Inverting an existing system, rather than proposing a genuinely new one, in many respects vindicates and validates that original system, rather than discrediting it and offering a true alternative.<sup>96</sup> This prompts Dentith to ask: ‘can utopian writing ever be anything other than an inversion of the society from which it springs?’ (1995: 137) and this question is an important one to ask of *Mystère-ville*. Does Lermina’s text succeed where Sue’s falls short, and manage to overcome the trope of inversion?

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<sup>96</sup> See my discussion of Bourdieu’s notion of the ‘*illusio* du champ artistique’ in IV.2 above.

In *Mystère-ville*, Lermina creates a city characterized by a curious mix of innovation and tradition, rather than polarized inversions. Crime, we are told, no longer exists: ‘il n’existe plus chez nous de crimes ni de délits, [et] même les mesquines discussions de vanité, d’intérêt, d’amour-propre mal entendu ont presque totalement disparu...’ (MVILLE: 139). But this potentially radical society is undermined by the survival of the High Court, an outdated vestige of the former Paris, where the trespassing narrator is tried on his arrival in the city:

« [...] Peu à peu toutes les idées surannées, égoïstes – qui font de l’homme un loup pour l’homme – se sont effacées.

« Pourtant il reste encore ce que j’appellerais volontiers un sanctuaire de préjugé, de la routine, comme un conservatoire de l’irraisonnement et de la barbarie ; je vous le dis hardiment, c’est la Grande Chambre !...  
(MVILLE: 139)

Alcide is outraged to find himself on the wrong side of the law, but Durand points out that *Mystère-ville* is much the same as Paris in its adherence to outdated laws: ‘Pour ma part, je déplore cet entêtement dans les coutumes surannées... mais il me semble que, dans votre pays, tant qu’une loi n’est pas abrogée...’ (MVILLE: 118).<sup>97</sup>

We see a limited use of the trope of inversion in references to gender roles in *Mystère-ville*. We are told that women can work and vote, but this creates (to echo a criticism Dentith levels at Lytton’s *The Coming Race*) ‘no more than a frisson of shock, with no real investigation of the cultural determinations of gender’ (1995: 142).<sup>98</sup> Thus the rationale behind women working and the implications of them

<sup>97</sup> On a similar use of inversion in Butler’s *Erewhon* (1872), in which the ill are treated as criminals, and readers and characters experience feelings of outrage, while being simultaneously obliged to recognize the inadequacy of such responses, see Dentith (1995: 140).

<sup>98</sup> According to Dentith, *The Coming Race*, in much the same way, falls short of providing ‘a real investigation of the likely personal and cultural consequences of [...] changes, so that the women remain remarkably like mid-Victorian ladies who spend a large portion of their waking time thinking about ‘love’’ (1995: 142).

doing so are explained in distinctly nineteenth-century terms, which the modern reader cannot help but notice, even if his contemporary counterpart did not: ‘Et pourquoi donc ne travailleraient-elles pas ? *N’ont-elles pas leur spécialité, couture, cuisine, soin et éducation des enfants ?*’ (MVILLE: 207, my emphasis). The fabrication of artificial flowers by *Mystère-ville*’s Isabelle, despite its futuristic twist (her metallic flowers, we are told, are made with uncanny mathematical precision and even replicate the perfume of real flowers (MVILLE: 174-5 and 226)) is otherwise exactly the same occupation as that of many female characters in the *mystères urbains*, Cécile in Boisgobey’s *Mystères du nouveau Paris* being just one of many examples.

The main role of women, and particularly of Isabelle, in *Mystère-ville*, appears to be in providing the romance and desire which are central to both the utopia and the palimpsest. According to Dentith, romantic desire acts as a symbol of social desire (1995: 150). The fact that Alcide and Isabelle are separated at the end of the novel, both ideologically, by their divergent political stances, and physically, amid the tumult of the imploding city, is clearly significant. The lack of romantic resolution must be read as a portent of social disaster.

Dillon, referring to ‘the psychoanalytic element of Kristeva’s concept of intertextuality’ (2007: 97), also notes the relevance of images of marriage and division to the notion of the palimpsest. The relationship between the texts of the palimpsest is defined by a doubleness and an ambiguity, much like the relationship between our protagonists, who lurch from the harmony signalled by the ‘hématomètre’ (‘un appareil enregistreur du plus haut intérêt et d’après lequel se décident les mariages’ (MVILLE: 270)) to the conflict of the final chapters.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> On the palimpsest as it relates to love and sexuality, see also IV.3 above.

Perhaps the most striking types of inversion, and the best illustrations of both the limitations of the trope, and of Lermina's awareness of these limitations, occur within the text. The simplistic opposition between the *phoniste* and *aromiste* factions, who despite their different inventions and divergent political views base their technology on the same sensory model, and even, tellingly, have leaders of the same name (Henri Morel for the *phonistes* and Henri Levèque for the *aromistes*) points to the inadequacy and superficiality of inversion. Similarly, when the children of the city stage a mini-revolution, freeing Alcide and forcing the adult judges into the dock to be tried themselves (MVILLE: 119), the trope of inversion is given a parodic twist. The simplistic substitution of the rhetoric of the future for that of the past ('j'en appelle aux enfants ici présents, qui sont non point les conservateurs du passé, mais les ouvriers de l'avenir...' (MVILLE: 140)) will be proved catastrophically inadequate as the novel progresses, the community descends into civil war and the city is destroyed.

### **A sense of justice: sight, sound, smell and the city**

To the notions of crime and justice he expounds in *Les Mystères de Paris*, Sue adds his ideas on punishment. In particular, he advocates blinding as an alternative to the death penalty. This proposal, with both Byzantine and biblical echoes, features as part of the diegesis, with Rodolphe's blinding of the Maître d'école (Appendix VIII.5.13), and is also explained and justified in a number of Sue's ideological digressions (Appendix VIII.5.14).

Marx attacks Sue's proposal on a number of levels, pointing out that the idea, like that of virtuous justice, had already been put forward by Bentham. The Maître d'école's dream the night he stays at Bouqueval, in which the ghosts of those he has

murdered return to haunt him, is only an involuntary atonement. The way in which Tortillard and la Chouette are able to profit from the Maître d'école's blindness is a clear indication of its failure as punishment. The murder of la Chouette, argues Marx, is Rodolphe's fault. The Maître d'école scratches her eyes out, just as Rodolphe did to him, and apes his hypocrisy by 'embellishing his cruel treatment with pious phrases'. La Chouette's wounding of her assailant is a convenient afterthought on the part of Sue, who 'can now let [the Maître d'école] kill her without any further moral casuistry'.

Marx also points out that Rodolphe is a hypocrite, whose self-righteous opposition to the death penalty gives way to bloodthirsty anger when Sarah tells him that Jacques Ferrand was the cause of the death of Fleur de Marie, who is Rodolphe's daughter:

Quand je ne savais pas qu'une des victimes du monstre était mon enfant... je me disais : « La mort de cet homme serait stérile... [...] Mais c'est ma fille qu'il a livrée, enfant, à toutes les horreurs de la misère... jeune fille, à toutes les horreurs de l'infamie !... s'écria Rodolphe en s'animant peu à peu ; mais c'est ma fille qu'il a fait assassiner !... Je tuerai cet homme !... (MP: 1120-1)

If Rodolphe doesn't kill Ferrand, this is only because he is dying anyway, consumed by a feverish lust exacerbated, fittingly, by a voyeuristic obsession with watching the temptress Cecily (who is working for Rodolphe) through a hatch in her bedroom door. Thus the sense of sight is the source of crime as well as punishment.

The senses are just as important, perhaps even more so, in *Mystère-ville*. Taken to the Hôpital Saint-Martin to recover from his traumatic arrival in the city, the narrator is overcome by colour, music and perfume (Appendix VIII.5.15). According to Khouri, this sensory surfeit is typical of the lost-race utopia and appears to translate a need to exoticize the everyday:

It is an overdetermination of perception, tied to the need to indicate excess and overfulfillment, which dominates the description of the lost race. The lost-race utopist endeavors to show the inadequacy of the quotidian and mundane, of anything to do with daily routine. Affluence must necessarily be translated by an expendable display of accumulation, and this is done through sensory glut. (1983: 176)

Prendergast describes the sense of smell as ‘an important source of practical urban knowledge’ (1992: 78), which had a privileged place in the nineteenth-century city, and particularly in its poorer districts (1992: 77):

it would be no exaggeration to say [...] that a whole new dimension appears to have been added in the nineteenth century to the phenomenology of urban sensibility, to the body’s way of monitoring its sensory world. At certain moments at least, the primacy traditionally granted to the sense of sight was dislodged from its supremacy by the sense of smell. (1992: 78)

Smell was frequently associated with dirt, death and disease, hence ‘the fantasy of the odourless city, ideally sanitized to a zero degree of olfactory disturbance’ (Prendergast 1992: 79). But in *Mystère-ville* the sense of smell has become both a technological and political force: *l’Aromapiézie*, or aromatic power, is promoted by the *aromistes* and sonic power, in the same way, is championed by the *phonistes*.<sup>100</sup> But in spite of (or perhaps because of) the technological advancements and political visions, the negative associations of the senses evoked by Prendergast tend to resurface in *Lermina*’s text. As Durand explains to Alcide: ‘le son est la base de notre mécanique, de notre industrie, même de notre thérapeutique... ses effets physiologiques sont extraordinaires... et, ajouta-t-il en baissant la voix, ils sont parfois étonnamment meurtriers...’ (MVILLE: 118).

Alcide’s condemnation to ‘la peine de la Phonothanotose’, or death by sound (MVILLE: 81) reminds us of Sue’s advocacy of blinding as punishment, but

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<sup>100</sup> On the importance of urban noise in Baudelaire, Fournel and others, see Prendergast 1992: 126-63.



Lermina goes out of his way to underline the absurdity of his idea, by making the narrator, as unwitting interloper in *Mystère-ville*, the innocent victim of the new technology, and by explaining how, incongruously, the same technology is used both to heal and to kill.

‘La Phonothanotose’ is just one of a number of examples of menacing machinery replacing the rather more metaphorical threats we see in *Les Mystères de Paris*. Criminals, for example, are frequently compared to reptiles in Sue’s text: ‘Ce début annonce au lecteur qu’il doit assister à de sinistres scènes ; s’il y consent, il pénétrera dans des régions horribles, inconnues ; des types hideux, effrayants, fourmilleront dans ces cloaques impurs *comme des reptiles dans les marais*’ (MP: 31, my emphasis). *Mystère-ville* begins with an apparently fantastic encounter strikingly reminiscent of Sue’s reptilian imagery. The narrator, who finds himself in an abyss following a blow to the head, describes:

une sorte de reptile, énorme, plus gros que mon corps, dont la peau était éclairée d’une phosphorescence... et qui descendait, suspendu sans doute par la queue à quelque anfractuosité du roc...

Cette chose demi lumineuse, – comme si elle eût été douée d’une faculté intime de radiation – se balançait... Je voyais la tête, ce que je croyais être la tête. Cela n’avait pas d’yeux... mais une bouche, pareille à l’orifice d’un tuyau de pompe... une espèce de gueule de pieuvre qui allait de-ci de-là, comme cherchant une proie... (MVILLE: 39)

But this is later afforded a rational explanation:

[...] nous avons su que quelque animal, un homme peut-être, rôdait dans notre enceinte intérieure : nous avons alors déployé notre aspirateur pneumatique...

– Quoi ! ce corps d’une laideur repoussante qui ressemblait à un serpent...

– N’était que le tuyau de notre machine aspiratoire, mue, comme toutes nos machines, par le son : sa force est telle que dans un rayon de plus

de quarante toises il attire, il avale, il hume tous les corps qui sont à sa portée... Vous ne pouviez lui échapper. (MVILLE: 118)<sup>101</sup>

References to sound and music also have distinct literary connotations, which bring us once again to the pervading self-consciousness of Lermine's text. Lowenthal notes that '[t]he recapture of past sounds is a recurrent imaginative theme' (1985: 20) and sounds, echoes and vibrations must be seen, in this context, to be synonymous with the written traces of palimpsests. Terminology such as harmony, cacophony and dissonance are commonly used in literary discourse and sound is, of course, particularly important to oral literature, with which popular literature has been frequently and fruitfully compared.<sup>102</sup>

In *Palimpsestes*, Genette explains that direct imitations of literature or music, unlike those in the visual arts, are insignificant, because purely mechanical:

Imiter directement, c'est-à-dire copier (recopier) un poème ou un morceau de musique, c'est une tâche purement mécanique, à la portée de quiconque sait écrire ou placer des notes sur une partition, et sans aucune signification littéraire ou musicale. [...] l'imitation directe, en littérature et en musique, et contrairement à ce qui se passe dans les arts plastiques, ne constitue nullement une performance significative. (1982: 110)

Indirect imitation, or transformation, are productive, where direct imitation isn't. Hence the curious 'cuisine analytique', which sees diners eat by interpreting a musical score, tapping out 'symphonies alimentaires'. The 'machine à manger' used to do this is, tellingly, 'tout à fait analogue à nos machines à écrire' (MVILLE: 175).<sup>103</sup> Once again, then, the way in which the narrator creates and transforms texts is being hinted at. If the amusing distraction of the futuristic paraphernalia is taken

<sup>101</sup> The image of violent, voracious ingestion is reminiscent of scenes from Zaccane's *Pieuvres de Paris*. These are discussed in IV.3 above.

<sup>102</sup> See, for example, Benjamin 1963, as well as section III.2 of this thesis.

<sup>103</sup> As Prendergast points out, the sense of 'taste' is also both metaphorical ('in the sense of educated sensitivity to the arts') and physical ('in the sense of [...] sensitivity to the pleasures of the body') (1992: 20). The notion of taste is also, of course, linked to that of consumption (see IV.3 and VI.1).

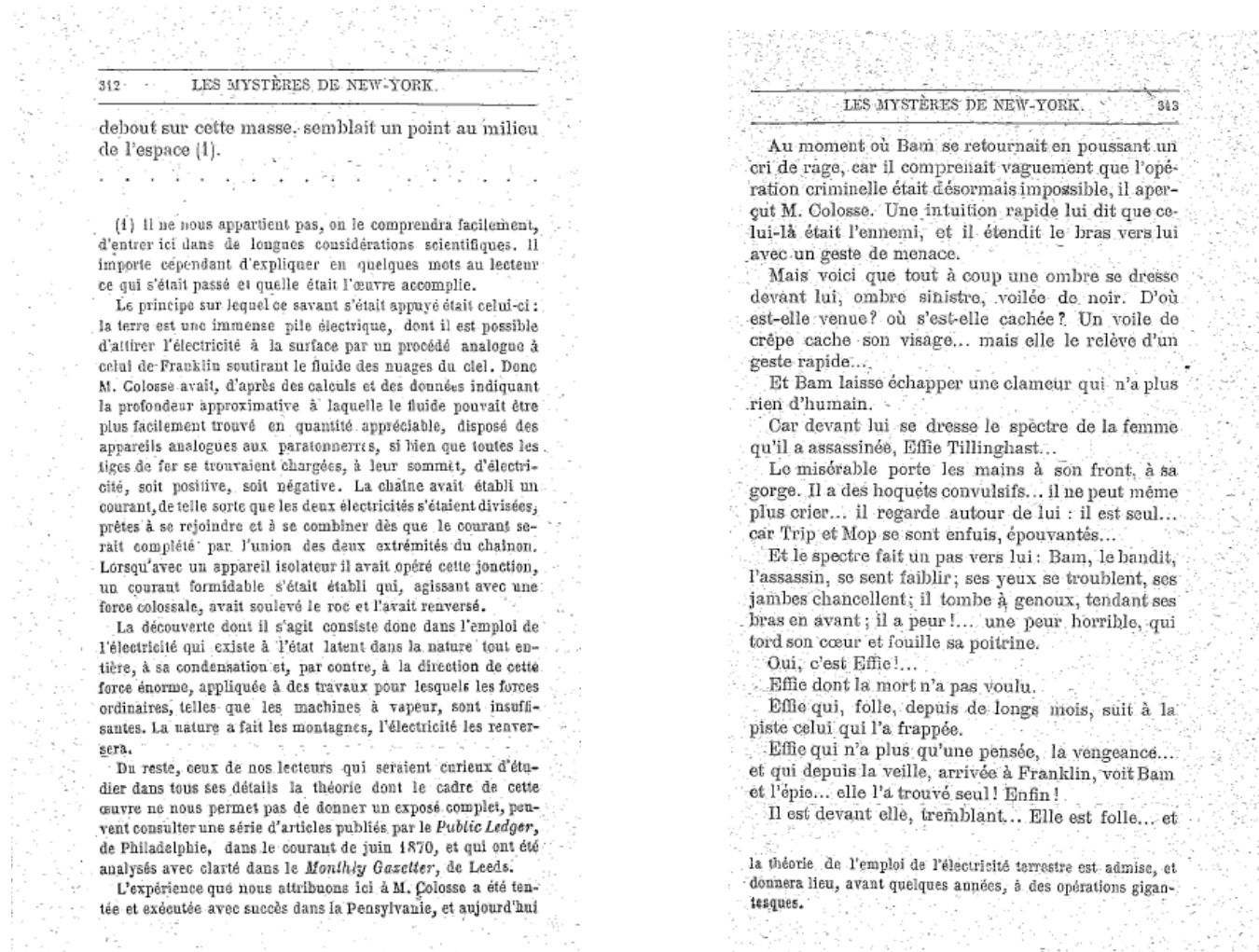
out of the equation, it is arguably the artistic process of creating and recreating which Lermina appears to be emphasizing.

According to Letourneux, the sketchy political ideology of the early *mystères urbains*, seen in the novels of Sue and Féval, gave way to stereotype and sensationalism in the later *mystères*, of the likes of Aimard, Boissigobey and Ponson du Terrail. But with *Mystère-ville*, we see a return to the political subtext. Its original publication, as action-adventure fiction in the *Journal des Voyages*, was somewhat innocuous, but the fact that Lermina published the novel under a pseudonym and did not manage to get it reprinted as a book in his lifetime (the Apex edition did not appear until 1998 and even then in a print-run of only 250 copies) is indicative of the degree of politically sensitive satire to be found in Lermina's version of utopia. So *Mystère-ville* marks not only a return to the political subtext of the early *mystères urbains*, but also a marked transformation of it. While Sue's utopian visions took themselves extremely seriously, and as such were an easy target for the derision of Marx, Lermina's self-conscious utopia provides its own criticism. Although it does, at times, provide incisive historical and political commentary, *Mystère-ville* also has an unmistakably metafictional resonance, in that, ultimately, the text is preoccupied less with the details of a given History and more with the strategies at work in the telling of any *histoire*. While Lermina's text, produced some sixty years after Sue's *Mystères de Paris*, clearly owes much to the original urban mystery, it thus exemplifies a move away from the mysteries of the city, and towards the compelling mysteries of the text itself.

This chapter has examined diegetic transpositions of *Les Mystères de Paris*, and demonstrated that the implications of the practice in fact extend beyond the diegesis.

In the next chapter, I will pursue the idea of the *mystères urbains* as an autonomous, self-reflexive genre, by considering serialization (VI.1), theatre adaptation (VI.2) and parody (VI.3).

Figure 5





## VI. FEUILLETON, PERFORMANCE AND PARODY

Having examined transformations pertaining to identity, and to the geographical and temporal aspects of the diegesis, operations which Genette describes as openly thematic ('les transpositions ouvertement et délibérément *thématiques*, où la transformation du sens fait manifestement, voire officiellement, partie du propos' (1982: 293, emphasis in original)), I will use this final analytical chapter to consider a number of other types of transformation.

First, I will consider the practices of serialization (VI.1) and theatre adaptation (VI.2). I will take issue with Genette's description of these as 'les transpositions en principe (et en intention) purement *formelles* [...] qui ne touchent au sens que par accident ou par une conséquence perverse et non recherchée' (1982: 293, emphasis in original), and demonstrate that far from being purely formal, these types of transformation have significant diegetic and extra-diegetic implications. Finally, I will consider parody (VI.3), which is, according to Genette's typology, a *ludic* transformation (the other transpositions considered thus far being *serious*). In attempting to pin down the specificity and significance of parodies of *Les Mystères de Paris*, I will, again, move away from Genette, whose take on parody is somewhat restrictive. I will, instead, draw on the work of a number of scholars who have emphasized the destructive and preservatory impulses of parody (which reflect the ambiguous impulses of the palimpsest), and, perhaps most importantly, on the work of those who see parody as an opportunity for the renewal of literature through a self-conscious exposition of its devices.

My argument throughout this chapter will be that there is an especially keen link between the structural and the semantic in the *mystères urbains*. Formal

concerns repeatedly coincide with thematic preoccupations, thereby reaffirming the compelling analogy between city and text pursued throughout this study. In the case of the *feuilleton*, Hayward argues that ‘formal and thematic considerations’ are in fact ‘inseparable from the unique reading practices and interpretative tactics developed by audiences’ (1997: 4). It is to these unique practices and tactics that I now turn.



## VI.1 – LA SUITE À DEMAIN: SERIALIZING THE CITY

Serialization was the standard publication format for the majority of nineteenth-century novels (Queffélec 1989: 119) and, because of the period spanned by the phenomenon (Queffélec charts its fortunes from 1836 through to 1914) and the changes to which it bore witness as a result of this impressive lifespan (for example, generic changes and evolving concepts of authorship and readership), the serial novel is often read as a revealing reflection of social and political history (Queffélec 1989: 120). Although my analysis is not diachronic in nature, the *mystères urbains* which make up my corpus present an undeniably interesting case study in this respect, given that their publication spans much of the period detailed in histories of the *feuilleton*,<sup>1</sup> from Sue's *Mystères de Paris*, serialized in the *Journal des Débats* (1842-3), to Lermine's *Mystère-ville*, serialized in the *Journal des Voyages* (1904-5).<sup>2</sup>

The material I have chosen to analyse, consisting of the 107 daily instalments of Aurélien Scholl's *Nouveaux Mystères de Paris*, which appeared in *Le Petit Journal* from 2 October 1866 to 16 January 1867,<sup>3</sup> originates from a particularly interesting period in the history of the *feuilleton*, during which the popular press flourished. The price of printed materials dropped, literacy levels rose and the rail distribution network expanded. All of these conditions conspired to create a mass culture phenomenon which, inevitably, created an anxiety and hostility comparable to that provoked by the literature of the July Monarchy period (Lyon-Caen 2006:

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<sup>1</sup> Queffélec, for example, divides the history of the *roman-feuilleton* into three broad periods: 1836 to 1866, characterized particularly by romanticism under the July Monarchy (1830-48); 1866 to 1875, which was a complex period of tremendous change and generic flux; and 1875 to 1914, when the *feuilleton* enjoyed its greatest success, but faced increasing competition from book editions and other media (1989: 7 and 75).

<sup>2</sup> See V.3 above.

<sup>3</sup> All references hereafter are to this original, serialized version of the text.

274). Moïse Millaud's *Le Petit Journal*, created in February 1863, was a central element of this thriving popular press. Millaud's publication was a daily newspaper costing just one *sou* (five *centimes*) and sold mainly *au numéro* (Queffélec 1989: 58), rather than by subscription. To be cost-effective, this necessitated print-runs of at least 100,000 copies (double that of the most successful political dailies of the time). The *feuilleton* played a critical role in maximizing sales.

The renaissance in *bas-fonds* fiction at this time, of which Scholl's novel is an example, came about in response to the salacious *faits divers* which enjoyed huge success in the popular press (Queffélec 1989: 59 and 69):

Avec la libéralisation de l'Empire, le renouveau du roman des bas-fonds et des misérables, à la Sue ou à la Hugo, se marque par de nombreuses publications : *Nouveaux mystères de Paris* (A. Scholl, *Le Petit Journal*, 1866-1867), *Mansardes de Paris* (P. Zaccane, *Le Petit Journal*, 1868-1869) et autres *Bas-Fonds de Paris* (Constant Guérault, *La Petite Presse*, 1870) apparaissent au rez-de-chaussée de tous les journaux. (Queffélec 1989: 60)<sup>4</sup>

Scholl's text was one of many to prepare the ground for the transformations of the *feuilleton* that would take place under the Third Republic, by which time, as Queffélec explains, the *feuilleton* was at the height of its popularity, with most daily newspapers publishing two or three *feuilletons* consecutively and with the stereotypes and ideologies of the serial form (depictions of women and different social classes and emphases on work, family and patriotism) at their most pronounced (1989: 75-99). Both *Le Petit Journal* and *Le Matin* announced an end to

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<sup>4</sup> As Queffélec explains, the growth in *bas-fonds* fiction was linked both to the continued popularity of the *roman de mœurs* and to the emergence of the popular press: '*Le roman de mœurs* a encore souvent pour cadre le demi-monde, mais l'apparition de la presse populaire donne un nouvel essor au roman des bas-fonds, et des milieux populaires : l'année 1866 voit ainsi publiés, dans *L'Opinion nationale*, *Le roman des ouvrières* d'E. Bosquet et *L'histoire d'une ouvrière* d'Auguste Marc-Bayeux, *La chanteuse des rues* d'Alfred Lapointe paraît dans *La Presse*. Des romanciers comme Zaccane, Bouvier, Guérault, Boulabert se spécialisent dans ce dernier genre' (1989: 65).

their publication of *feuilletons* but, tellingly, this was a decision on which both were obliged to backtrack (1989: 77).

Scholl's novel also offers a particularly interesting case study in light of the author's involvement in both popular fiction and journalism. He could be said to exemplify the textual eclecticism of the *quotidien* and the mélange of fact and fiction which was typical of many of the texts featured, both *romans* marked by their 'exigence de référentialité' (Lyon-Caen 2006: 148), and news stories or *faits divers* given an unapologetically sensationalist spin.

The form of the literature of this period is, arguably, just as important as its historical significance, and there are a number of arguments for studying a novel such as Scholl's *Nouveaux Mystères de Paris* in its original, piecemeal format. According to Keymer, the circumstances of production and consumption of serial texts, coloured by protraction, interruption and accumulation, have 'major interpretative implications' (2002: 85). This is perhaps the point Zybinn is hinting at when he quotes Diderot in one of his lists of 'maximes' in *Les Mystères de Nice*: 'On n'écrit pas comme on fait des ourlets, et les idées ne se reprennent pas quand elles sont coupées, comme on renoue des bouts de fil' (NICE II: 16).

The dangers of the modern book edition are numerous. Readers of modern editions of serial novels are not only disadvantaged (ironically) by the completeness of their historical knowledge, which deprives them of the unfolding context of the original publication,<sup>5</sup> but are also presented with the *fait accompli* of the book format.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the problem is not just one of historical context, as even nineteenth-

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<sup>5</sup> Of Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend*, Hayward writes: 'Contemporary readers [...] had the advantage of reading a plot that meshed cleanly with current ideologies [...]. And perhaps most important, contemporaries were drawn into this "sudden" personality change [that of Bella] over half a year rather than in the few days of our reading of the text' (1997: 72).

<sup>6</sup> 'Modern editions of *Tristram Shandy*, by rendering it stable and complete as a material object, inevitably obscure this key dimension of the work [its serial publication], and the radical fluidity

century readers ‘often found a novel read in instalments to be better than the very same novel in book form’ (Iser 1978: 191).<sup>7</sup> Serial fiction is, in fact, inseparable from the experiences of its writing and reading,<sup>8</sup> and critical attention must give due precedence to these acts, rather than misguidedly concentrating on book editions, whose completeness, though aesthetically pleasing and offering a certain convenience for the reader, is nonetheless extremely misleading. In the case of fiction written originally for serial publication, the book edition both obscures the original composition process and redefines the reader’s approach to the text, and both are impulses which muddy the waters from the researcher’s point of view. As Keymer puts it, what is at stake in serial fiction, and what the researcher must be at pains to acknowledge, is very much an ‘unstable process’,<sup>9</sup> rather than a ‘static product’ (2002: 85). Scholl’s serialized novel, then, and indeed the original, serial versions of all the texts of my corpus, as well as being hypertextual transformations of Sue’s *Mystères de Paris*, are also very much hypotexts in their own right, whose original publication format we ignore at our peril.

In addition to the aforementioned daily instalments of Scholl’s *Nouveaux Mystères de Paris*, I will also refer to some pre-publication publicity material which appeared in the same newspaper, and to a number of articles from *Le Tintamarre*, which parodied both the *feuilleton* in general and Scholl’s novel in particular. Although I will touch on the topic of reader participation in the serial text (and this is undoubtedly a fertile line of enquiry, as studies such as that of Prendergast (2003)

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thereby entailed. We can hold *Tristram Shandy* entire in our hands from start to finish, consume it without enforced interruption, move around it at will. It is easy to forget that its original conditions of consumption, transmission, and reception were very different’ (Keymer 2002: 85). See also Keymer 2002: 108.

<sup>7</sup> See also Iser 1971.

<sup>8</sup> On the conflation of the two activities suggested by a blurring of gender categories, see IV.3 above.

<sup>9</sup> Keymer also describes the text as a ‘performance’ (2002: 85), an idea to which I will return in the following section of this chapter (VI.2).

have demonstrated), due to practical constraints<sup>10</sup> I will not pursue this in any great detail. I will also avoid, as I have done throughout this study, the temptation toward aesthetic judgment of the serials in question. Positioning myself outside the ‘history of critical denigration of serial fiction’ which Hayward describes as a ‘critical myopia’ (1997: 5), my focus, as advocated by Hayward (1997: 11) will be on function rather than ‘quality’.<sup>11</sup>

Hayward describes the serial in extremely neutral terms as ‘an ongoing narrative released in successive parts’ (1997: 3). Other definitions are more suggestive of the critical issues at stake in the serialization process and thus of the particular interest that serial fiction might have for the academic researcher. According to Sutherland, for example, serialization is ‘the division of narrative into separately issued instalments, *usually for commercial convenience but occasionally for art*’ (1995: 87, my emphasis), while Hughes and Lund’s definition refers to ‘a continuing story over an extended time *with forced interruptions*’ (1991: 1, my emphasis).<sup>12</sup> With these definitions in mind, my analysis in this section will focus on the industrial metaphor commonly used to describe the *feuilleton*, as well as on the form’s ‘democratic’ impulse, which produced effects of polyphony and fragmentation while also fostering a sense of community, as part of a wider process of blurring (formal and ontological as well as social) boundaries. My argument will be that the *mystères urbains* typify the *feuilleton*, at times to the point of parody, and that this is principally due to a coincidence of formal and thematic concerns.

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<sup>10</sup> On the dearth of first-hand evidence from readers of Dickens’s serialized novels and the resultant problems posed by any attempt to evaluate reader response, see Hayward 1997: 33-5.

<sup>11</sup> On various works which seek to ‘reverse both the long-standing rejection of mass culture [...] and to break down hierarchies of high and low culture’, Bourdieu (1979) in particular, see Hayward (1997: 10).

<sup>12</sup> See also Keymer 2002: 87.

### **‘De la littérature industrielle’**

As Dumasy explains, from the July Monarchy onwards, ‘le but [du journal] n’est plus uniquement de diffuser des idées, mais de faire des profits’ (1999: 7). The creation, in 1836, of Émile de Girardin’s *La Presse* heralded a new financial model for the newspaper. Subscription prices underwent drastic cuts, made possible by new revenue from advertisements. Editors needed to keep subscription rates high to attract advertisers, and Girardin realized the potential of the *roman-feuilleton* to do this (Dumasy 1999: 6).<sup>13</sup> Such commercial change was closely linked to industrial change. New technologies facilitated both the production and distribution of cheap printed materials, for which there was an increased demand due to the mass influx of population into urban areas as a result of industrialization (Hayward 1997: 17 and 21-2).

Serialized literature soon gained the epithet *industrielle*<sup>14</sup> and critics, most famously Sainte-Beuve (1839), seized on the model of industrial production as a disparaging metaphor for mass culture (Hayward 1997: 25 and 27). As Queffélec explains, the industrial analogy hinges on the importance of factors such as time, quantity and cost to *feuilleton* production, factors which, in Keymer’s words, saw artistic freedom subjected to ‘an unyielding, quasi-industrial kind of discipline’ (2002: 86), often at the expense of quality: ‘Industrielle, la littérature feuilletonesque l’est, selon les critiques, parce qu’elle subit l’emprise de l’idéologie capitaliste

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<sup>13</sup> Hayward also recognizes ‘a crucial connection between economics and serialization’ (1997: 3), pointing out: ‘[t]he advantages of the form for producers are obvious: it essentially advertises itself, providing ever-increasing profits’ (1997: 2).

<sup>14</sup> According to Dumasy, ‘c’est le terme alors employé, beaucoup plus que « commerciale »’ (1999: 12).

productiviste : il faut produire vite, beaucoup, à bas prix, et peu importe que le produit subisse alors une baisse de qualité' (Dumasy 1999: 12).<sup>15</sup>

This had implications for the criteria according to which the value of a text was judged, as well as for the source of that judgement, as Dumasy goes on to explain: 'L'évaluation de l'œuvre tend à n'être plus esthétique, mais commerciale. Parallèlement, le critique se voit dépouillé de son magistère par le public, qui plébiscite, ou rejette' (1999: 14).

A preoccupation with the commercial over the aesthetic is evident even before the first instalment of Scholl's novel appears. *Le Petit Journal* of 26 September 1866, for example, relegates a brief, platitudinous comment on the style and content of the forthcoming novel to the end of an article which stresses, instead, the unprecedented print run in preparation (Appendix VIII.6.1). The article illustrates both the precedence given to commercial success and the agency of the reader (to whose active role in the serialization process I shall return) in creating that success.

Parodies of the *feuilletons* of Scholl and others pick up on the industrial and commercial concerns of the form. *Le Tintamarre* of 28 October 1866, for example, carries a tongue-in-cheek announcement of a new type of fiction, the *roman-robinet*, with the mechanical image of the tap providing a means of harnessing the raging river<sup>16</sup> so as to release water (or narrative) in controlled quantities. Authors are to be paid '*au crime*' rather than '*à la ligne*', and the consumer (note the use of the term '*acheteur*' rather than '*lecteur*') is promised reimbursement if the novel does not

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<sup>15</sup> Hayward makes the same link between serialization and capitalism: 'Hughes and Lund agree with Norman Feltes [1986] in seeing the serial as paralleling nineteenth-century capitalism in that both require an investment of time and money [...] and both privilege abundance, even excess, such that serial "richness of detail and expansion of the text over time suggested a world of plenitude" [Hughes and Lund 1991: 4]. I would add to their analysis the fact that both serial novels and capitalism institutionalize delayed gratification, while the serial re-creates fiction in capitalism's image by providing what is essentially a payment plan for narrative, thus simultaneously increasing audience and profits and lowering costs' (1997: 29).

<sup>16</sup> The use of the water metaphor in this satirical piece could, indeed, be seen as an anticipatory nod to the twentieth-century concept of the '*roman-fleuve*'.

deliver a pre-defined number of murders. Value is thus measured in decidedly quantitative, rather than qualitative terms (Appendix VIII.6.2).

Time is a similarly fundamental preoccupation of the *mystères*, particularly in their serial form.<sup>17</sup> If the form was subject to temporal as well as spatial constraints (Keymer 2002: 92 and 106), then this was also reflected in the content. The urban life depicted was one characterized by speed<sup>18</sup> and fascinated with the calibration of time, as a result, for example, of newly defined notions of work and leisure.<sup>19</sup> Contemporaries, according to Dumasy, noted that ‘le roman-feuilleton [...] est bien la littérature qui convient à notre société affairée, pressée, ennuyée [...]’ (1999: 16).<sup>20</sup>

In echo of the time-conscious city which provided both the topic and the publication context of the novel, the *Nouveaux Mystères* make regular and meticulous mention of dates and times, both fictional and real. The first instalment (PJ 2 October 1866), for example, begins: ‘Le 20 novembre 1853, à une heure après minuit, deux hommes suivaient la rue Saint-Louis au Marais’. The end of the instalment – ‘– Où donc porterons-nous le corps ? – Demain au jour, j’aviserais...’ – creates a deliberate confusion between fictional and reading times:<sup>21</sup> the ‘demain’ in question is that of the characters speaking (Aly and Monseigneur), but also that of the reader and writer.

There are also a number of episodes in Scholl’s novel where watches are broken, and these mechanical disruptions of time invariably prove to be turning points in the narrative. The comte de Navarran, for example, uses a watch spring to

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<sup>17</sup> See also Dumasy 1999: 13.

<sup>18</sup> See Prendergast 1992: 5, 6, 132 and 191-3.

<sup>19</sup> See also V.2 above.

<sup>20</sup> On the preoccupation with time, its flight and its pressures, see also Keymer 2002: 136-7.

<sup>21</sup> On the interplay between *Erzählzeit* (the time of narrating) and *erzählte Zeit* (the narrated time), see Keymer 2000.



break into the casket containing the keys and papers that give him access to his new life as head of the Société des Vingt-et-Un:

L'idée me vint de me servir du ressort de ma montre comme d'une lime.  
 Je la brisai, cette montre, le seul souvenir qui me restât de mon père !  
 Elle avait marqué l'heure de ma naissance ; elle était suspendue au  
 chevet du lit paternel, quand mourut celui à qui je devais le jour...  
 Je la brisai ! (PJ 16 October 1866)

M. de Pulnitz, the hypnotist who provides the entertainment at a ball held by the baronne de Remeney, is shown to be a consummate manipulator of time from the moment of his entrance: 'Par un calcul de charlatan, le chevalier de Pulnitz s'était présenté dans les salons de la rue de Ponthieu au moment où minuit allait sonner'. Pulnitz's act involves him stopping a clock belonging to the hostess:

– Votre pendule va-t-elle bien, madame ?  
 – Très-bien.  
 – Je vais l'arrêter.  
 M. de Pulnitz étendit la main vers la pendule.  
 Le marteau, qui sonnait le cinquième coup, retomba sur le timbre  
 avec un son fêlé ; on entendit à l'intérieur comme quelque chose qui se brise,  
 et les deux aiguilles tombèrent sur la cheminée. (PJ 23 October 1866)

This dramatic party piece is the prelude to Louise Deslions (who has been given shelter by Edwige, the baronne de Remeney's adopted daughter) being summoned and recounting, in a hypnotic trance, the murder of a child at the hands of Robert Kodom. Pulnitz's role echoes that of the serial novelist, repeatedly manipulating time to maximize the dramatic effect on both characters and readers.

Via the story of the baron de Remeney, the parallel between time as experienced in the diegesis and that experienced by the reader is made even more explicit. Imprisoned for seventeen years in an underground cell by Kodom, his wife's lover, Remeney marks the passage of time by the daily food parcels sent

down to him: ‘Lorsque le pain et l’eau descendirent par la voûte, je fis une marque ici... Une autre marque le lendemain. Et ainsi de suite. [...]’ (PJ 29 October 1866). Remeney’s situation clearly echoes that of the *feuilleton* reader, with eating providing an obvious metaphor for consumption in its commercial sense,<sup>22</sup> and the underground cell echoing the location of the serial *au rez-de-chaussée* of the newspaper page.

Another element worthy of consideration in my comparison of industrial and literary production is the quality of the product. As Dumasy explains, industrial literature is characterized by its uniformity: ‘À l’inverse du livre-objet d’art, infiniment singularisé et individualisé, le livre-produit industriel – en l’occurrence le roman-feuilleton – se répète infiniment à l’identique, ou avec d’infimes variations’ (1999: 14).<sup>23</sup> Scholl plays with the reader’s expectations of similarity. At times, he acknowledges and emphasizes the novel’s relationship to Sue’s *Mystères de Paris*, his title being the most obvious example. We might also mention the similarity of the comical concierge Poitevein (PJ 4 October 1866) to Sue’s Pipelet characters; the opposition of Remeney’s father to his marriage to Wanda (PJ 26 October 1866), which echoes the disapproval of Rodolphe’s father at his relationship with Sarah, (MP: 251-2); and a scene where Jean explores the underground gallery of the hôtel des Vingt-et-Un, only to find it rapidly filling with water (PJ 19 October 1866), strikingly reminiscent of an episode in which we see Rodolphe almost drown after being locked in the cellar of the Cœur-Saignant by the Maître d’école (MP: 142-3). In other instances we see Scholl playing down, if not denying altogether, a

<sup>22</sup> Keymer’s reference to the division of the serial text into ‘bite sizes’ (2002: 93) is particularly apt in light of this metaphor.

<sup>23</sup> See also Eco’s explanation of the association of novelty with Art, versus the association of ‘[t]he pleasurable repetition of an already known pattern’ with Crafts and industry (1990: 83). Hayward makes a similar point in noting that ‘texts marked serially tend to attract audiences who have already enjoyed other serials’ (1997: 13). On product loyalty as a key element of the promotional apparatus of serials, see Hagedorn 1988: 5.

relationship of influence, as in the pre-publication publicity article shown in Appendix VIII.6.3.

In *Le Tintamarre*, the question of quality is less about similarity versus novelty than about the supposed slow-wittedness of the novel's fans,<sup>24</sup> which becomes something of a running joke. The riddle shown in Figure 6, for example, ends with a heavy-handed explanation, purportedly for the benefit of fans of the *Nouveaux Mystères*, naively engrossed in the breathless narrative and unequal, so the piece would have us believe, to evenly mildly sophisticated wordplay.<sup>25</sup> If the quality of the novel and the intellectual capacities of its readers are the object of wry humour here, then the importance of articles such as these is perhaps in demonstrating the critical distinction emerging at this time between popular and elite forms of fiction and their respective readerships. If the novel in general was considered 'artistically and morally suspect' (Hayward 1997: 24), the *feuilleton* was increasingly depicted as the lowest form of the genre.

The tradition of using images of physical lowliness to evoke artistic inferiority had a long history: 'c'est pour tous ceux qui aiment encore profondément les lettres le moment de veiller. De nos jours le bas fond remonte sans cesse, et devient vite le niveau commun, le reste s'écroulant ou s'abaissant' wrote Sainte-Beuve (1839: 43). But, as the *fin-de-siècle crise du roman* loomed, and the critical distinction between popular and elite forms of fiction became more pronounced, the *mystères urbains*, whose thematic focus on the moral baseness of city life echoed

<sup>24</sup> On the 'potentially [...] mind-numbing effects' of mass culture, see also Hayward (1997: 6).

<sup>25</sup> See also *Le Tintamarre* of 28 October 1866: 'AVIS AUX LECTEURS DU PETIT JOURNAL *Le Tintamarre* leur fait grâce, pour cette semaine, de la Note explicative avec laquelle il dissipe, – ou plutôt essaye de dissiper chaque dimanche, – le brouillard épais qui obscurcit leur intelligence. Il les prend en pitié, les voyant absorbés dans la lecture des *Nouveaux mystères de Paris* d'Aurélien Scholl. Ils ont déjà assez de peine à démêler l'écheveau sanglant du *roman-Chassepot* qui tue, sans effort, quinze chrétiens à la minute.'

their publication in the much derided *feuilleton* form, confined, fittingly, to the foot of the printed page, came to epitomize this new, 'low' form of literature.

In addition to the factors common to serials and industrially-produced goods discussed above, Hayward adds that 'both serial novels and capitalism institutionalize delayed gratification' (1997: 29).<sup>26</sup> A favourite technique of the serial is to engage what Barthes (1970) termed the hermeneutic code ('the code for the posing and unravelling of enigmas' (Prendergast 1992: 94)) in one *feuilleton* instalment and postpone its resolution to a subsequent instalment (Hagedorn 1988: 7). Serial breaks are strategically placed so as to 'coincide with moments of unresolved crisis' (Keymer 2002: 127), as in the examples of endings of the serial instalments of Scholl's novel shown in Appendix VIII.6.4, which use unanswered questions, exclamation (devoid of explanation) and *points de suspension* to keep the reader 'hooked and buying' (Keymer 2002: 105).<sup>27</sup> The deliberate cultivation of suspense and titillation of the reader is, to some extent, a feature of all literary communication. As Iser puts it: 'Communication in literature [...] is a process set in motion and regulated not by a given code but by a mutually restrictive and magnifying interaction between the explicit and the implicit, between revelation and concealment' (1978: 168-9). If it is a particularly pronounced feature of the *feuilleton*, this is because the delayed gratification has an economic, as well as a literary, function: the reader is not only being encouraged to read the next instalment, but also, and perhaps more importantly, to buy it.

The importance of such cuts is underlined in *Les Nouveaux Mystères*, as the reader's relationship to the text is fictionalized on a number of occasions, for

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<sup>26</sup> On the deferral of desire and satisfaction in both capitalist societies and serial narratives see also Hagedorn 1988: 11 and 12. On the significance of the sexual connotations inherent to the notion of deferred desire, see also IV.3 above.

<sup>27</sup> On cutting techniques, see also Iser 1978: 191.

example in an episode where the young Navarran and his friend spend the night in prison after a minor misdemeanour and find a fragment of text written on the cell wall by a previous prisoner:

« Je suis pris. On m'a reconnu, tout est donc fini pour moi.

» Si un camarade passe par ici, qu'il aille aux bois de Vincennes ; il prendra la deuxième petite allée à gauche, en tournant le dos au donjon, au pied du plateau de Gravelles...

» En creusant au pied du septième arbre, à droite... »

C'était tout.

L'homme avait-il été interrompu ?

L'avait-on transféré de cette prison provisoire à une prison plus sérieuse ?

Ou bien, n'avait-il pas voulu en dire plus long ? (PJ 15 October 1866)

Intrigued by the incomplete text, the two go to the woods and unearth the casket whose contents will give Navarran access to his new life as head of the Société des Vingt-et-Un. In an even more overtly metafictional moment, Combalou realizes the *feuilletonesque* power he can wield by withholding information: 'M. Combalou, s'apercevant que le père Joseph prêta une certaine attention à la conversation, pensa qu'il en avait dit assez. Il ajouta donc : – La suite au prochain numéro !' (PJ 21 October 1866).

In this way, 'delayed gratification' in Scholl's novel is thematic as well as formal, a feature of the lives of his characters as much as the experience of his readers, and its effect intensified as a result. My conclusion to this initial section, then, must be that if, as Hayward argues, serials are 'inseparable from the system of production that impels them' (1997: 27), then this is especially true of the *mystères urbains*. The urban, industrial context of nineteenth-century Paris not only defined the production and reception of these texts, but also provided their subject matter. Thanks to this coincidence of form and subject, the *mystères* could be said to exemplify the serial text.

### Polyphony and fragmentation

Dumasy makes a clear link between ‘industrial’ and ‘democratic’ literature: ‘[d]e l’industrialisme de la littérature moderne – du roman-feuilleton – à son « démocratisme », il n’y a qu’un pas, les deux sont liés dans les esprits’ (1999: 15).

In fact, the novel in general is frequently described as a democratic genre, as Prendergast explains:

the novel is commonly seen as a genre at once distinctively urban and culturally ‘democratic’. This is not just because of its external conditions of production and reception – the role of the novel in the social extension of the reading public in the nineteenth century; the growth of city-based forms of publication and distribution ensuring the primacy of the novel in the development of what Sainte-Beuve, from the point of view of an alarmed cultural elite, called ‘littérature industrielle’. It has to do with the structure of the form itself, its openness to multiple voice and point of view, its tendency towards inclusiveness and its respect for differences. (1992: 27)<sup>28</sup>

Democracy is an especially important notion in the context of the *feuilleton* (Keymer 2002: 120), where the traditional narrative focus on a single hero or heroine is subverted and replaced by a plethora of characters and storylines (Hayward 1997: 33)<sup>29</sup> which combine to create what Hayward describes as a ‘Bakhtinian polyphony’ (1997: 75). The fact that the titles of my corpus invariably refer to plural nouns (most frequently, of course, *Les Mystères...*) bears testament to this polyphony. Scholl’s *Nouveaux Mystères* shifts from a third-person narrative focusing on Jean Deslions to embedded first-person narratives recounted by the comte de Navarran (PJ 15-18 October 1866) and baron de Remeney (PJ 26-29 October 1866). This polyphony is also acknowledged in the diegesis, when we see Monseigneur, in the very first

<sup>28</sup> On the novel as ‘le genre même de l’âge démocratique’, see also Lyon-Caen (2006: 255).

<sup>29</sup> On the structural manifestations of Dickens’s political progressiveness (‘every character of every one of Dickens’s novels can be perceived as hero or heroine of at least one part-issue section’), see Hayward (1997: 32-3). See also Hayward 1997: 50.

instalment of the novel, surrounded by the Société des Vingt-et-Un's numerous dossiers pertaining to various criminal factions and their illegal activities. The narrator's exclamation establishes a parallel between Monseigneur's bewilderment and the situation of the *feuilletoniste*: 'Il tenait les fils mystérieux d'un si grand nombre d'existences !'

But radical shifts in point of view were, it is important to note, by no means the exclusive preserve of the *feuilleton*. These shifts, which meant that 'the whole text [could] never be perceived at any one time' (Iser 1978: 108) were symptomatic of an indeterminacy or inconsistency characteristic not only of texts (as Iser informs us, '[l]arge-scale texts such as novels or epics cannot be continually 'present' to the reader with an identical degree of intensity' (1978: 16))<sup>30</sup> but of communication in all its forms: 'indeterminacy is a prerequisite for dyadic interaction [i.e. interaction between two parties], and hence a basic constituent of communication' (Iser 1978: 59).

As Iser explains, in the nineteenth-century novel, the wandering viewpoint, which 'constantly switches between the textual perspectives, each of the switches representing an articulate reading moment' (1978: 114) came to replace the 'eighteenth-century hierarchy within the character perspective (hero at the head, minor characters beneath)' (1978: 205). This absence of a hierarchical structure providing a predominant perspective is also typical of later fiction, such as that of Joyce (Iser 1978: 102 and 184) and the *nouveau roman* (Iser 1978: 102). Iser describes the 'blanks' and shifts in perspective which 'demand increased productivity on the part of the reader' (209-10) and which we have found to be

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<sup>30</sup> This is what Hobsbaum terms the concept of 'availability': 'however unified a work may be in intention, it is sadly fragmented in effect [...] just as all of his experience is not available even to the most gifted creative writer, so all of the writer's work is not available to even the most gifted reader' (Hobsbaum 1970: 47f).

typical of the *feuilleton* as ‘minus functions’ which are especially characteristic of ‘modern’ texts. Indeed, he ventures, ‘[i]t might almost be true to say that the more ‘modern’ the text, the more will it fulfill its ‘minus functions’ (1978: 208).

In this way, the *feuilleton* could be seen as a kind of anticipatory parody of the modern novel. Both are characterized by the same polyphony, but this is multiplied and magnified for maximum commercial effect in the *feuilleton*. Such an understanding of the *feuilleton* helps us to revise the traditionally negative approach to serials and other popular forms. If much the same mechanisms can be identified in both serial fiction and more esteemed forms of the novel, the only difference being one of degree, then popular fiction must be seen as part of a ‘broad continuum’, ‘distant, but not categorically distinct’ from more elite forms of fiction.<sup>31</sup>

In the *mystères urbains*, the parodic effect is exaggerated even further by the fact that polyphony and fragmentation are thematic as well as formal concerns: the city as well as the text is ‘a pluralistic and democratic space of diverse voices’ (Prendergast 1992: 23) and Paris ‘a space occupied by rival interpretations’ (16-7).

The same could be said of other types of fragmentation in my texts. Fragmentation and open-endedness are characteristic of the nineteenth-century novel and the nineteenth-century city alike:

one of the lessons of the nineteenth-century novel, even in its most expansive phases, is the impossibility of a fully settled knowledge of the reality of the city. If the city remains an object of desire, and crucially of the desire for social and intellectual mastery, it can never be finally mastered, either by the hero or the language of the novelist. Even as it strives for encapsulation and closure, the novel tells us of that supremely important and immensely complicated truth: that the great cities of modernity never close.  
(Prendergast 1992: 30)

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<sup>31</sup> I borrow the helpful terms from Keymer (2002: 87).



The *feuilleton*, with its daily increments, exacerbates the fragmentation of the novel even further. The importance of the fragment, and the appropriateness of form to content and vice versa, is made clear in pre-publication publicity material for Scholl's novel:

Ce Paris *vu à la loupe* montrera des monstres, des créatures hideuses, des gnomes ténébreux qui échappent d'ordinaire aux regards distraits.

Toutefois, on ne trouvera pas uniquement le côté repoussant du monde, ses terreurs et ses crimes dans ces récits accidentés.

Pour la consolation de l'humanité, pour le repos de l'esprit, plus d'une pierre fine, plus d'un diamant sans tache... apparaîtront à *l'aide du verre grossissant* de l'habile romancier. (PJ 30 September 1866, my emphasis)

The emphasis is clearly on homing in on specific parts of the city, rather than on attempting to apprehend it as a unified whole. In the precedence they give to the fragment, the serialized *mystères* anticipate a number of twentieth-century, modern and postmodern, approaches to the city, which are ever mindful of acknowledging its 'thickening opacity and splintering fragmentation' (Prendergast 1992: 213). Certeau's 'rhétorique piétonnière' (1990 [1980]), which relies on the figures of metonymy and synecdoche ('the endless encounter of parts for wholes')<sup>32</sup> is brought to mind, as is Benjamin's *Arcades Project* (1999).<sup>33</sup> The fragmentation of these texts and their refusal of unity, therefore, just like their exaggerated polyphony, invite us to read the *mystères* as a kind of novelistic parody *avant la lettre*.<sup>34</sup>

An alternative approach to nineteenth-century Paris was provided by the panoramic view, 'outside and above the city' (Prendergast 1992: 161), held to have both educational and entertainment value, and at the height of its popularity under

<sup>32</sup> See Prendergast 1992: 209-10.

<sup>33</sup> Horkheimer [...] described the Arcades project as an attempt at 'grasping the epoch from the small symptoms of the surface', [quoted in Frisby 1988: 200] or, in Benjamin's own terms, the positing of the 'small, individual moment' as a 'crystal' from which can be read or inferred the shape of the 'total event' [1999: 461] (Prendergast 1992: 213).

<sup>34</sup> 'Miller [1958: 279-327] sees the novel as anticipating twentieth-century modernist fiction in refusing the solution of a knowable, objective, unified world' (Hayward 1997: 81).

the Third Republic (Prendergast 1992: 46).<sup>35</sup> Aristotle had claimed that the ideal city was one that could ‘be taken in at a single view’ (Prendergast 1992: 48). Coherence, unity and closure have been similarly idealized from the point of view of the text.<sup>36</sup> Though the assumption of an urban ‘unity’ was ‘in both the literature and the painting of the period [...] as much contested as affirmed’ (Prendergast 1992: 48), the panoramic view did nonetheless provide a reassuring impression of mastery in the face of the troubling social, political and artistic complexities of the city.<sup>37</sup>

But the panoramic view, though undoubtedly convenient and reassuring, also represented a threat to the city’s vitality. Prendergast refers to ‘a link between seeing the city whole and imagining it dead, a hidden and dangerous relation between the totalizing fantasies of the panoramic view and fantasies of destruction’ (1992: 209) and describes panoramic photographs of the city, such as Victor Navlet’s *Vue générale de Paris en 1855, prise d’un ballon*, as ‘precise, meticulous and dead’ (1992: 49).<sup>38</sup>

In fact, the city’s fragmented nature, its ‘messy complexities and contradictions’ (Prendergast 1992: 69) are integral to our understanding of it. The *mystères* seem to acknowledge this, and the particular power of the *feuilleton* to convey this, by making frequent references to newspaper texts.<sup>39</sup> In the example

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<sup>35</sup> See also Robichon 1985.

<sup>36</sup> On the importance of such features to the Formalists, for example, see Keymer 2002: 86.

<sup>37</sup> Prendergast describes the panoramic view as a kind of aesthetic balm: ‘The *discours du parcours* [Philippe Hamon’s term for the panoramic gaze] [supplies] a point from which [...] material can be observed and ordered free of the threat of being submerged (‘drowned’) by its proliferating abundance. The panoramic view thus goes hand in hand with the aestheticizing perspective; both are intent on making wholes out of parts, stitching fragments, ‘slices’ and ‘tableaux’ into coherent patterns’ (1992: 71). See also Hamburger (1969: 268) on the effort to see the city from an ‘aesthetically soothing distance’, ‘a vantage point from which its contradictions are transcended and resolved’ (Prendergast 1992: 161).

<sup>38</sup> The mention of Navlet’s photograph reminds us of Alcide’s departure, in his flying basket, from the ‘dead’ *Mystère-ville* (see V.3). The association of panoramic knowledge with death is also found in Certeau (1990 [1980]) (Prendergast 1992: 209).

<sup>39</sup> ‘[The newspaper] is, in the domain of mass culture, the mode of fragmentation and neutralization *par excellence*, in which the world is represented as de-contextualized and disconnected bits and pieces. The newspaper lives off, but also neutralizes, the sensational story, by virtue both of the

shown in Appendix VIII.6.5, the reader learns the fate of Louise Deslions via a *fait divers*, which, until the narrator ‘translates’ it and makes explicit its link with the preceding narrative, is as confusing as it is illuminating.

Just as the opacities provoked by fragmentation and de-contextualization are intrinsic to the city, rather than anomalous, so the *feuilleton* form is imperative to our appreciation of the *mystères urbains*. If much nineteenth-century popular fiction has not survived the test of time, then this is due, at least in part, to the fact that the narratives in question have been unceremoniously separated from their original, serial format and reproduced as ‘one shot’ publications, which iron out the very features which were constitutive of meaning in the original. In this way, the modern book edition could be said to be the textual equivalent of the panoramic view of the city.

### **Building communities, breaking boundaries**

If the democratic impulse of the *feuilleton* produced effects of polyphony and fragmentation, it also, conversely fostered a sense of community among readers. Community was a central concern of the nineteenth-century novel as a whole (Hayward 1997: 31, 32; Williams 1993 [1973]). Novels introduced different social classes to each other, ‘thus helping to promote mutual understanding and to catalyze social change’ (Hayward 1997: 30). This was especially true in the city, where there was a pervasive sense of alienation. As Remeney remarks in Scholl’s novel: ‘Oh ! que Paris est horrible à qui souffre, à qui se sent isolé au milieu de cette foule indifférente et toujours pressée !’ (PJ 28 October 1866). If urbanization provoked

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unrelated items that lie alongside it on the same page and its abstraction of the story from any wider history; deprived of meaning, the sensational becomes simple ‘thrill’, immediately forgotten once the effect of novelty has gone’ (Prendergast 1992: 160).

this sense of alienation in the first place, it also offered an antidote, in the form of the novel:

urbanization compressed people with neither familial nor occupational ties into closer and closer contact; early urbanites in many cases shared nothing but poverty and profound alienation. [...] Novels provided a community of “friends” to discuss with neighbors and co-workers and thus helped to mitigate this condition [...]. (Hayward 1997: 32)

Serials were particularly important in that their publication in daily increments made such discussions a regular activity. Reading in groups, for economic reasons, especially prior to *la vente au numéro*, when the only means of purchasing a newspaper was via an expensive subscription, or for social reasons such as illiteracy, (Hayward: 1997 17-8 and 36) reinforced the sense of community. The serial was thus a particularly ‘powerful means of forging shared interests, values, and demands’ (Hayward 1997: 30).

Like the other formal features discussed here, this sense of shared interests can also be seen at the level of the diegesis, with surprising similarities between impoverished and aristocratic characters becoming increasingly apparent. Jean, for example, while reading Navarran’s manuscript, is reminded of his own predicament (Appendix VIII.6.6).

Jean’s recognition of the echoes between his own story and the embedded narrative, and the narrator’s pointed reminder to the reader that we are dealing with two different levels of narrative, is important in that it draws our attention to other, ontological boundaries breached by the text, such as that separating fact from fiction.<sup>40</sup> On a number of occasions, we see Scholl’s characters either struggling to distinguish between the two, or else deliberately trying to cultivate confusion. For

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<sup>40</sup> As Hayward explains, the serial text’s disruption of boundaries ‘between fiction and reality, dream and business, manly sport and womanly indulgence’ is one of the main causes for concern among reviewers (1997: 26).

example, when Louise Deslions, hypnotized by Pulnitz, speaks of a murdered child's body hidden in a wall, the culprit tries to dismiss her ramblings as 'mélodrame', only for the hypnotist to point out that fiction and reality are not mutually exclusive:

– Assez, monsieur ! dit-il [Kodom] à M. de Pulnitz. Nous n'avons que faire de ces mélodrames !

M. de Pulnitz laissa tomber sur le banquier un regard profond :

– Savez-vous, monsieur, si ce mélodrame n'a pas été une réalité ?

(PJ 23 October 1866)

The confusion of fact and fiction was encouraged by the hybridity of newspapers, which published *feuilletons* alongside serious news stories (Lyon-Caen 2006: 180) so that 'le journalisme contamine le roman, le haut du journal déteint sur le bas' (Lyon-Caen 2006: 184-5). Scholl capitalizes on this hybridity, referring to his novel as '[une] étude' ('L'auteur de cette étude a vu [...]') (PJ 20 October 1866)), and asserting the authenticity of his material on a number of occasions,<sup>41</sup> as in Appendix VIII.6.7, part of the résumé published between the first and second parts of the novel and, significantly, not included in the book edition. Readers' letters suggest that Scholl's insistence as to the factual nature of his text was taken at its word (Appendix VIII.6.8).

Elsewhere, the confusion between fact and fiction points to a similarly blurred boundary between author and reader. The pre-publication publicity article shown in Appendix VIII.6.9, for example, while important in claiming that Scholl's novel will be entirely different from that of Sue, thus playing with the reader's expectations of similarity from the serial text, as discussed above, is also key in that it provides a fictional account of Scholl's encounter with, and sympathetic response

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<sup>41</sup> On similar tactics, in Sue's *Mystères de Paris* in particular, see Lyon-Caen 2006: 20 and 183-5.

to, a succession of Sue's characters, all eager to influence his work in progress so as to avoid being portrayed in a negative light.

The implication that fictional characters were real people, on intimate terms with the *feuilletoniste*, added to the sense of community which, as already noted, was needed to counteract the alienation of city life. But this article also points to the evolving relationship between reader and author. If the idea of characters influencing the *feuilletoniste* was far-fetched to say the least, the notion of parties other than the author having input in the elaboration of serial texts was nonetheless a crucial one, and the agency of readers in particular very much a reality.<sup>42</sup>

The complicity between author and reader is indicated by the narrator's use of an inclusive subject pronoun: 'abandonnons le vicomte à ses souvenirs et à ses regrets. Nous avons laissé Jean Deslions étendu, sans mouvement, au fond des oubliettes de la rue Saint-Louis' (PJ 24 October 1866).<sup>43</sup> There are also regular appeals to a shared experience of the city, via 'ce qu'un critique appelait le portrait démonstratif,<sup>44</sup> mettant en jeu la culture plus ou moins hypothétique du lecteur (« une de ces peintures que, un de ces regards qui, un de ces hommes qui », etc.)' (Maurus 1982: 67-8). The first instalment of the the *Nouveaux Mystères*, for example, refers to 'une de ces tristes soirées où les Parisiens, n'ayant même pas le courage de sortir de chez eux, laissent les théâtres vides comme au milieu de l'été' (PJ 2 October 1866). The implication is that the type of evening being described is well known to both author and reader.

In other instances, the reader is called upon directly to collaborate with the author in producing meaning, as we have seen in our examination of the blanks

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<sup>42</sup> See also IV.3 above and Prendergast 2003.

<sup>43</sup> See Lyon-Caen 2006: 181 and Maurus 1982: 67. On the collective 'we', see also Hayward 1997: 2 and 63.

<sup>44</sup> The reference would appear to be to Bellet 1974.

created by breaks in the narrative. As Iser explains, ‘we try to imagine how the story will unfold, and in this way we heighten our own participation in the course of events. Dickens was a master of the technique; his readers became his ‘co-authors’’ (1978: 191).<sup>45</sup>

The role of the *feuilletoniste* in relation to his readers is echoed in the narrative by the elusive ‘chef inconnu’ (PJ 3 October 1866) of the Société des Vingt-et-Un.<sup>46</sup> Just as the reader plays an ever more prominent role in producing meaning in the serial text, so the secret society members are brought to the fore of the narrative, while their would-be leader remains invisible and anonymous.

Linked to reader involvement in the production of meaning is the idea that the serial text is ‘processive and various, not one thing’ (Harden 1979: 14),<sup>47</sup> in line with the understanding of the text not as a pre-defined product, but rather ‘the object of a progressive discovery’ (Iser 1978: 222),<sup>48</sup> whose meaning is “‘produced in the reading process” rather than existing *a priori*’ (Hayward 1997: 10).<sup>49</sup> But, again, we are not dealing with a phenomenon specific to the *feuilleton*. The onus placed on the reader’s ‘constitutive activity’ by the text’s blanks and negations (Iser 1978: 169-70) is present, to a greater or lesser degree, in all texts. It is not unique to the *feuilleton*, but given a definite showcase in *feuilleton* form, which presents itself as a self-conscious parody of literature itself.

In conclusion, because the city provided the subject matter of the *mystères*, as well as the context for the production and reception of the *feuilletons*, metaphors of industrial production and notions of democracy, at once thematic and formal,

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<sup>45</sup> See IV.3 above.

<sup>46</sup> Note that the anonymous secret society leader appears in other *mystères urbains*, such as Aimard’s *Invisibles de Paris*.

<sup>47</sup> On literature as process versus literature as product, see also Frye 1956 and Keymer 2002: 101.

<sup>48</sup> Iser quotes Riffaterre (1973: 250). See also Iser 1978: 210-1.

<sup>49</sup> Hayward quotes from Spigel (1985).

enjoyed special prominence in these texts. Nowhere could urban life be more fruitfully explored than in serial form, and nowhere could the characteristics and controversies inherent to the *feuilleton* be echoed more emphatically than in novels about the city.<sup>50</sup>

This felicitous coincidence of form and subject is perhaps best explained by returning to the palimpsest trope which is one of the key contexts for this study. If the successive serial instalments of a given text can be described as a series of ‘overlays’<sup>51</sup> then the same image of palimpsestuous layering can be used to explain the entire process of serial production and reception. As Keymer explains, we are dealing with a process in which ‘the normally distinct sequence of writing, printing, and reading’ becomes ‘a tangle of overlapping, mutually imbricated events’ (2002: 86).<sup>52</sup> According to Hayward, this overlapping has become more pronounced as serialization has developed:

Once regarded as distinct entities to be treated in isolation from each other, text, production, and consumption have become increasingly intertwined, their borders blurred by the realization that, as John Fiske contends with regard to television, “there is no text, there is no audience, there are only the processes of viewing” (1997: 16)<sup>53</sup>

The *mystères urbains*, in which an overlapping of form and content echoed and emphasized an overlapping of the activities of reading and writing, must be seen as a definitive early example of this now common phenomenon.<sup>54</sup>

Two views of the serial text which have stood out here will be my focus in the following two sections of this chapter: first, the notion of the text as a process,

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<sup>50</sup> Keymer notes a similarly ideal marriage of form and content in *Tristram Shandy*: ‘Nowhere could [the anxiety about the human capacity to comprehend and signify, to make one’s mark in an unstable world] be more persistently explored than in serial form’ (2002: 135).

<sup>51</sup> I borrow the apt and evocative image from Harden (1979: 14).

<sup>52</sup> See also Keymer 2002: 104.

<sup>53</sup> Hayward’s quotation is from Fiske (1989: 57).

<sup>54</sup> Again, see also IV.3 above.



event or performance, which I will pursue in my analysis of theatre adaptation (VI.2) and second, the notion of the *feuilleton* as a parodic exaggeration of what are otherwise quite standard features of literary texts or communication in general, an idea to which I will return in my section on parody (VI.3).



Figure 6

## JEUX INNOCENTS DU TINTAMARRE

### PROBLÈME PROPOSÉ DIMANCHE DERNIER

AYANT L'ALPHABET À RÉCITER, À QUELLE LETTRE DOIT-ON RESPIRER POUR  
N'EN OUBLIER AUCUNE ET NE PAS NOMMER DEUX FOIS LA MÊME?

### SOLUTION

On doit respirer après la lettre **M**.

CHOEUR DES ABONNÉS DU *PETIT JOURNAL*

**POURQUOI?.....**

### RÉPONSE À CES INFORTUNÉS

Parce que c'est absolument à l'**M** qu'il faut s'arrêter quand l'on  
veut reprendre à l'**N**.

### NOTE SUR-EXPLICATIVE

POUR CEUX DES ABONNÉS DU *PETIT JOURNAL* QUI COLLECTIONNENT  
LES NOUVEAUX MYSTÈRES DE PARIS

D'AURÉLIEN SCHOLL

REPRENDRE HALEINE.



## VI.2 – THE CITY *EN SCÈNE*: THEATRE ADAPTATIONS

Theatrical metaphors communicated with particular efficacy the complexities and ambiguities of social interaction in nineteenth-century Paris. As Miranda Gill explains: ‘Acting threatened to undermine the foundations of social life by destabilizing the link between appearance and reality [...] during a period of social mobility in which wealthy appearances did not invariably signify social distinction’ (2009: 117).<sup>55</sup>

But the idea of performance also offered an antidote to these ambiguities, in the form of panoramic literature,<sup>56</sup> whose analysis and circumscription of a variety of behaviours meant that social life could be conveniently ‘scripted’ (Gill 2009: 45). Etiquette and conduct manuals, for example, ‘provided a script for each social occasion and promised to ‘shield’ the bourgeoisie from social blunders’ (Le Wita 1994: 142). The subjection of such scripted behaviours to the public gaze was another form of social control (Gill 2009: 43). Panoramic literature was thus ‘an intrinsically performative genre, in that it acted upon the social world as much as it described it’ (Gill 2009: 8).

Performance thus functioned in two, apparently contradictory, ways. It was capable of accentuating the mysterious discrepancies between appearances and reality which were characteristic of city life, but also, conversely, of counteracting that sense of mystery by categorizing and scripting behaviour, and thereby subjecting it to public scrutiny. The paradoxical power of the performance trope thus echoed the

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<sup>55</sup> Charle makes similar comments about the theatricality of urban life: ‘*A la ville comme à la scène les vedettes contribuent à donner le ton à la société, leur vie se résumant à un paraître perpétuel*’ (1979: 129, my emphasis).

<sup>56</sup> See II.2 above.

basic dialectic of the *mystères urbains*,<sup>57</sup> and so helps explain the importance of theatrical references, analogies and adaptations to my corpus.

The theatre was central to literary life in general at this time. As McCready and Prasad note, it was a recurrent topic in the memoirs and correspondence of novelists and poets, as well as dramatists (2007: 33-4). The theatre clearly influenced the novel, the most obvious example being Balzac's *Comédie Humaine*, with its constituent *Scènes*, in which Paris was depicted as a *theatrum mundi* (Sennett 1986: 34-5; Gill 2009: 45).<sup>58</sup>

Theatrical production itself was widespread and intense (Cooper 2007: 9; Dufief and Cabanès 2005: 5). A large number of theatres necessitated a quick turnover of plays, and so theatre adaptations of successful novels were common (Cooper 2007: 9; Dufief and Cabanès 2005: 5; Thomasseau 2002: 12). The boulevard theatres, which attracted huge numbers, often meant an even larger audience than that of the *feuilleton* or book (Ripoll 1982: 148; Galvan 2002: 40). Theatre adaptation was also an extremely profitable enterprise, much more so than book publication (Dufief and Cabanès 2005: 5-6), and indeed the main source of profit for many authors (Charle 1979: 79 and 113-4).

While clearly a key nineteenth-century cultural practice, the significance of theatre adaptation is wider than it may at first appear. As Cooper explains, the synergy between the novel and the theatre was one that 'gave rise to modern mass culture', in that it prefigured the current relationship between the novel and both film

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<sup>57</sup> See II.1 above.

<sup>58</sup> On the hybridity of many texts of this period, see Cooper 2007: 13 and 14, Montclair 1998: 5 and McCready and Prasad 2007: 33 and 36. On Balzac in particular, see also Charle 1979: 84 and Marcandier-Colard 1998: 215. McCready and Prasad also note theatrical themes and techniques in Stendhal and Sand (2007: 35), and in Hugo and Flaubert (2007: 36-7), while Montclair singles out Hugo and Mérimée (1998: 13).

and television, which have similar audiences as popular theatre and are governed by the same commercial and cultural imperatives (2007: 15).<sup>59</sup>

If theatre was central to the literature of the period, this was particularly true of melodramas such as the *mystères urbains*. While Thomasseau discusses the influence of the novel on theatrical melodrama (2002: 11-12), Prendergast also acknowledges the influence which operated in the other direction:

That melodrama, as a distinctive stage form, exercised a certain influence on the development of popular fiction is well known; given the spectacular commercial success of the form, it is in no way surprising that the nineteenth-century popular novelist turned to it as a source of inspiration for both subject matter and technique. But if it is true that stage melodrama exercised some influence on the development of a certain kind of prose fiction, the reverse is equally true; the process of interaction was essentially a two-way one. The boulevard theatres of the 1830s and 1840s, for example, were to a large extent sustained by dramatic adaptations of the texts of the popular novelists: Scott, Ainsworth, Dickens in England, Sue, Dumas, Balzac in France are major examples. (1978: 5)

Unsurprisingly, given the obvious dialogue between dramatic and novelistic modes, adaptations of melodramas such as Sue's *Mystères de Paris* were numerous, at least up until the end of the Second Empire and the destruction of the popular boulevard theatres during Haussmann's transformations of the city in the 1860s. McCready and Prasad interpret these adaptations as a direct result of the similarities between the serialized novel and the theatrical melodrama:

not only did theatrical melodrama share with the serialized novel many formal and rhetorical properties, but serialized novels were also regularly adapted and performed as melodramas for the boulevard theater. As John McCormick explains in his comprehensive study of French popular theater, "audiences [came] to see in flesh and blood on the stage the characters with

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<sup>59</sup> Dufief and Cabanès agree that we are dealing with 'un phénomène aujourd'hui encore très vigoureux, même si les réécritures sont plutôt cinématographiques que théâtrales' (2005: 10). See also Montclair 1998: 5 and Pao 1998: 12 and 41. Gauthier acknowledges the same equivalence and chooses to concentrate on film and TV rather than theatre adaptations (2011: 484-511), citing ease of access to the 'représentation' as one of his reasons (486). But note Pao's underlining of the fact that theatre adaptations were also enjoyed in print (see note 69 below).

whom they were already familiar in popular novels which had often appeared in serial form in the ‘feuilletons’ of the newspapers.” (2007: 39-40)<sup>60</sup>

The fact that theatre adaptation was such a lucrative and, as such, inevitable, prospect heightened the influence between dramatic and novelistic modes even further. As Ripoll explains, ‘le travail du romancier est commandé par la perspective du théâtre : écrivant en vue d’adaptation, il donne à son récit une construction dramatique’ (1982: 148).<sup>61</sup> Hence the opening to Sue’s novel, which famously declares: ‘Ce début annonce au lecteur qu’il doit assister à de sinistres *scènes*’ (MP: 32, my emphasis). Similarly, in Féval’s *Mystères de Londres*, chapter titles such as ‘La loge noire’, ‘Le cabinet de travail’ and ‘Le bureau de Mr Bishop’ (LOND: 98, 188 and 248) suggest a unity of place which owes much to the dramatic mode.

The theatre is also central to the action of Féval’s novel. A key early episode takes place in Covent Garden’s *théâtre royal*, where the antics of Féval’s characters attract considerably more attention than the performance of Carl Weber’s *Freischütz* they are supposedly there to see (LOND: 75-104) and, throughout the novel, the theatre provides a meeting place for criminal, or morally dubious, assignments (e.g. LOND: 91 and 293). Chapter titles such as ‘Comédie’ and ‘Drame’ (LOND: 120 and 125) reinforce the theme, and characters repeatedly refer to themselves as actors putting on a performance. For example, when Brian de Lancaster goes to see his brother, comte de White Manor, to ask for money to help Susannah (the comte’s daughter), and the pair clash, he is acutely aware of the public assembled in the street below the window: ‘Milord, continua Brian qui se dirigea vers la fenêtre, il y a foule... entendez-vous? C’est la foule avide et curieuse. Nous n’aurions pu choisir un

<sup>60</sup> McCready and Prasad’s reference is to McCormick (1993: 87).

<sup>61</sup> Alexandre (2005) makes a similar point, referring to a ‘pré-codage dramatique’ in Sand, while Morteliet (1998) notes the same theatrical aesthetic in Verne’s novels.



public plus nombreux et plus convenable pour notre dernière comédie' (LOND: 320).

This equation of social interaction to self-conscious public performance serves to make what is happening 'off stage' or 'behind the scenes' all the more intriguing. As Gill explains: '[t]he concept of the *coulisses* – the secret machinery upon which the appearances of social life depended – was a dominant theme in Parisian mythology, traversing Balzac's *Comédie humaine* and many representations of the underworld' (2009: 147).<sup>62</sup>

Theatre is thus used particularly effectively to evoke the world of crime, hence a number of theatrical references in the names of criminal characters and locations, such as 'le roi Lear' (LOND: 345) and 'le spirit shop de Shakespeare, connu dans Londres entière pour être le rendez-vous des voleurs de toutes sortes' (LOND: 258). Similarly, Frank Perceval describes the 'magnificence théâtrale' of the secret society meeting he infiltrates (LOND: 267).

With the centrality of performance and spectatorship to both urban life and literature in mind, in this section I will consider the process of *transmodalisation* ('toute espèce de modification apportée au mode de représentation caractéristique de l'hypotexte', according to Genette (1982: 395)), and specifically the implications of transposing the *mystères urbains* from the narrative to the dramatic mode, or *dramatisation* (the opposite, and less common, type of transformation being *narrativisation*) (Genette 1982: 396). As Genette explains, the dramatization of narrative texts is a hypertextual practice with a very long history, and particularly where mystery narratives are concerned:

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<sup>62</sup> On the 'règles occultes' of the theatre, see also Charle (1979: 114). For a literal treatment of the metaphorical notion of the *coulisses*, see Léo Lespès's *Mystères du Grand Opéra* (1843).

Cette pratique s'est maintenue tout au long de l'histoire en passant par les Mystères (d'après la Bible) et les Miracles (d'après les Vies des saints) du Moyen Age, le théâtre élisabéthain, la tragédie classique, jusqu'à l'usage moderne de l'«adaptation» dramatique (et aujourd'hui, plus fréquemment, cinématographique) des romans à succès, y compris ces auto-adaptations tant pratiquées au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle [...]. (1982: 396)

Given that theatre adaptations of *Les Mystères de Paris* have already been analysed in some detail in articles by Krakovitch (2005) and Ripoll (1982) and that Schopp (2005) has already produced a fascinating and detailed analysis of the dramatization of Dumas's *Mohicans de Paris*, my case study here will centre on Féval's adaptation of *Les Mystères de Londres*. This was entitled *Les Mystères de Londres ou Les gentilhommes de la nuit, drame en cinq actes et dix tableaux* and first performed at the Théâtre Historique on 28 December 1848 (hereafter referenced as LOND2). With the limitations of the present study in mind, this section will not be used to examine the history of the play, its censorship, staging and reception. As in Ripoll's study, '[s]euls seront pris en considération les rapports que le texte des pièces entretient avec celui des romans' (1982: 149). To use the terms of Dufief and Cabanès, my emphasis will be on 'les enjeux dramatiques' of the adaptation, rather than 'les enjeux idéologiques' (2005: 7-8).

Crucially, I will also take a rather different stance to that of Ripoll, whose conclusion bemoans 'l'insuffisance' and '[l]a médiocrité' of the adaptation, a result of what he terms 'la spécificité de l'œuvre romanesque de Sue' (1982: 155).<sup>63</sup> Rather than enumerating 'les résistances du romanesque', I will concentrate on 'les potentialités dramatiques de l'œuvre source' (Dufief and Cabanès 2005: 6),

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<sup>63</sup> Thomasseau is similarly critical of the adaptation in comparison to its hypotext, observing that 'l'intrigue du roman est la plupart du temps devenue méconnaissable, tant elle a été remodelée, tronquée, nivelée, tant elle a perdu, surtout chez Sue, sa force subversive au profit d'un moralisme convenu. [...]' (2002: 13). In the introduction to their edited volume on nineteenth-century theatre adaptations, Dufief and Cabanès note that '[l]a plupart des communications [déplorent] l'appauvrissement que l'adaptation théâtrale entraîne' (2005: 9).

identifying a number of ways in which Féval shrewdly exploits the dramatic mode so as to ensure continued interest in his novel.

### **Place, time and action**

Although unities of place, time and action are not respected in the classical, Aristotelian sense in Féval's play, there is nonetheless a definite move towards unity in the theatre adaptation as opposed to the novel. This is clearly the result of the condensation and simplification required when transposing a capacious *roman-feuilleton* to the stage.<sup>64</sup>

The action of the play is confined to ten settings, or *tableaux*. These are, however, extremely varied, ranging, for example from 'Une salle du palais Saint-James' (TROISIÈME TABLEAU) to 'un *cellar*, ou cave de Saint-Gilles' (SIXIÈME TABLEAU). This variety suggests a desire to expose the mysteries of the city by showing all facets of it, and this is underlined by those tableaux which indicate that the stage is to be divided, so as to provide, literally, a cross-section, juxtaposing two, conflicting spaces:<sup>65</sup>

#### HUITIÈME TABLEAU.

L'intérieur de l'Hôtel du Roi Georges. Théâtre coupé en deux horizontalement. Au rez-de-chaussée, salle de taverne ; en haut, chambre à coucher, table.

(LOND2: 33)

As a number of critics have noted, the concept of the dramatic *tableau* works in much the same way as a painting or illustration, providing the spectator with a ready-

<sup>64</sup> See Dufief and Cabanès 2005: 8 and Krakovitch 2005: 30.

<sup>65</sup> As Marcandier-Colard points out with regard to guillotine scenes in romantic fiction, stages which place different characters at different heights also reflect the positions of the various elements of the audience watching the play: '[ l]'architecture de ces scènes peut également rappeler l'agencement d'une salle de théâtre. [...]' (1998: 201).

made image whose finality curbs the multiple interpretations of the text which are otherwise possible: ‘la scène réduit les multiples représentations mentales libres de la lecture à *une seule représentation sommaire et figée*. L’adaptation tue le roman, mais en laisse, pour une génération du moins, une image saisissable’ (Schopp 2005: 84, my emphasis).<sup>66</sup>

Temporal concentration of action is common when novels are transposed into the dramatic mode,<sup>67</sup> and might be assumed to compromise the mystery which is cultivated in the novelistic mode by temporal flashbacks and digressions, and further facilitated by the length and staggered publication of the *feuilleton*. But the temporal concentration we see in Féval’s play, while certainly lending a chronological simplicity not found in the novel, also adds to the tension and suspense of the narrative by creating a sense of urgency. Indeed, Marcandier-Colard sees dramatic suspense as the model for its novelistic equivalent: ‘un roman, à l’image d’une pièce de théâtre, se compose d’épisodes, ou plus exactement de scènes, qui s’additionnent. Cette dynamique crée la tension, le *suspens* de l’œuvre’ (1998: 170).

Gruff, for example, in an early aside to the audience, warns that ‘Il y aura de l’orage ce soir...’ (LOND2: 2). Predictions of impending events continue throughout the play, culminating in Suzannah’s<sup>68</sup> despair at Rio-Santo’s imminent arranged marriage ‘Mary Trevor épouse Rio-Santo dans une heure. [...] Dans une heure, ils seront mariés’ (LOND2: 37). The supposed inevitability of these events, which, if we are to believe the characters’ insistence, will come to pass before the conclusion of the play, promises spectators that the narrative will be resolved in line with their

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<sup>66</sup> See also Marcandier-Colard 1998: 199 and 218, and Thomasseau 2002: 15. On the ‘illustration-tableau’, see Cox 2000: 43-4 and Sanders 2006: 22. On the importance of the *tableau* and its cognate modes (in particular the *physiologie*), see Prendergast 1992: 184-8. See also III.3 above.

<sup>67</sup> See Genette 1982: 397-8 and Ripoll 1982: 149 and 150.

<sup>68</sup> Note that the character’s name is spelt ‘Susannah’ in the novel and ‘Suzannah’ in the theatre adaptation.

expectations, and yet, as we will see in our analysis of the play's dénouement, such emphatic predictions are not always to be trusted.

In much the same way, while the action of the theatre adaptation compared with that of the novel is characterized by an apparent simplification, new complexities and ambiguities are in fact created by this. Ripoll explains how action is given precedence over all other narrative elements:

A la différence de ce qui se passe dans le roman-feuilleton tel que le pratique Eugène Sue, tout dans le drame est subordonné à l'action, une action toujours urgente, toujours prête à rebondir, toujours fertile en surprises. [...] Il s'agit [...] de tout ramener à l'unité d'une lutte qui se poursuit du début du drame au dénouement. (1982: 150)

Although we might expect this to simplify the narrative, it is important to note that the emphasis placed on action is at the expense of description and explanation. At the beginning of ACTE V. DIXIÈME TABLEAU, SCÈNE X, for example, a stage direction in parentheses informs us that '*Suzannah [...] vient d'achever l'explication du baiser et d'accomplir la mission de Perceval*' (LOND2: 36). The explanation itself does not feature in the script. This kind of ellipsis suggests that most spectators came to Féval's play with a pre-existing knowledge of the novel, as well as supporting Pao's argument that plays were frequently read in print form, as well as viewed as theatre performances (1998: 31-2).<sup>69</sup> Such spectators thus enjoyed the status of privileged 'initiates' (to return to what has become a familiar rhetoric)<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> '[I]n the nineteenth century there was a great demand for the printed texts of even moderately successful plays. Such was the demand that publishers were known to employ stenographers to transcribe the text during a live performance. [This demand was not] confined to the literate members of society and certainly not to any particular class. Studies of nineteenth-century reading practices have revealed that the reading aloud of a wide range of texts – newspapers, stories, political and religious tracts, and even philosophical writings – had long participated in patterns of sociability that gave the illiterate access to published material. [...] The verification of [...] the status of the printed text as historical evidence is critical, since for most nineteenth-century plays this printed text [...] is the only part of the original work that has survived intact' (Pao 1998: 31-2).

<sup>70</sup> See I, III.1 and IV.2 above.

whose prior knowledge of the narrative afforded them ‘les délices du ressouvenir’ (Dufief and Cabanès 2005: 6).<sup>71</sup>

Other appeals to the spectator’s prior knowledge of the narrative are deliberately specious, characterization being a good example. Both the characters participating in the action and the subplots in which they are implicated are considerably less numerous than those found in Féval’s novel. Ripoll refers to ‘une profonde redistribution des rôles’ (1982: 151), which sees some characters promoted, others demoted, and others removed altogether. Such cuts were effected in order to meet the practical demands of the dramatic mode, such as the obvious limitations pertaining to both the length of the performance and the number of actors involved (Ripoll 1982: 149).

The compression of several characters into one is a good example.<sup>72</sup> Theatre adaptations of the *mystères* typically have a single ‘héros du mal’ around whom all the criminal activity revolves, and this lends a certain unity to the action.<sup>73</sup> In Féval’s adaptation, this aggregate role is given to le docteur Moore. In the novel, Moore tries to poison Frank Perceval after his duel with Rio-Santo (LOND: 62-8) and also conducts sinister medical experiments on both Mary Trevor and the MacFarlane sisters (LOND: 154-7, 284-291). His role is augmented considerably in the theatre adaptation, from which a number of the novel’s other criminal characters, such as Tyrrel l’Aveugle/Sir Edmund Mackenzie and Rowley, are absent.

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<sup>71</sup> On the retrospective, rather than prospective, nature of the spectator’s pleasure in the theatre adaptation of Dumas’s *Mohicans de Paris* (‘[le spectateur] n’est pas quelqu’un qui avance dans l’inconnu d’une intrigue inouïe, mais quelqu’un qui se souvient de l’intrigue lue’), see Schopp (2005: 84). Marcandier-Colard compares the spectator’s ‘sentiment de supériorité informationnelle’ to that enjoyed by the reader of the historical novel (1998: 191-2), already referred to in V.2 above.

<sup>72</sup> On the same technique in the dramatization of *Les Mohicans de Paris*, see Schopp 2005: 73.

<sup>73</sup> In the dramatization of *Les Mystères de Paris*, this ‘héros du mal’ is Jacques Férand (‘Ferrand’ in Sue’s novel) (played by Frédéric Lemaître) (Ripoll 1982: 151).

But, ironically, some changes which we might expect to simplify and unify the action are so radical as to be a new source of mystification. The exclusion of a whole host of characters from the theatre adaptation (Stephen McNab, his cousins Clary and Anna, their father Angus MacFarlane and Brian de Lancaster, to name just a few) necessitates sweeping changes to the relationships between the characters who remain and the action in which they are involved. For example, the Clary of the theatre adaptation is the sister of Suzannah,<sup>74</sup> and Donnor, a minor character in the novel, their father (LOND2: 1-3). In the absence of Brian de Lancaster, Suzannah, rather than Clary, is in love with Rio-Santo (LOND2: 7). A series of appeals are thus made to the spectator's knowledge of the novel, only for the expectations created by that knowledge to be playfully subverted. The fact that, as Dufief and Cabanès note, theatre adaptations 'ont [...] rarement atteint une autonomie suffisante pour être représentées quand le roman est oublié' (2005: 9) is significant. While this was certainly evidence of the mediocrity of the plays, it also bears testament to the fact that the spectator's awareness of the play's relationship to, and, specifically, its divergence from, the hypotext was critical to its appreciation.

But perhaps the most striking changes to the action are to be found in the *dénouements* of dramatizations of the *mystères*, which are often changed beyond all recognition so as to achieve a sense of resolution and closure entirely at odds with the *feuilleton* aesthetic:

À l'encontre du roman historique en feuilletons, qui [...] est porté par sa nature profuse à donner des œuvres à la lettre « interminables », toujours « à suivre », comme si le genre ne pouvait se résoudre à la clôture de l'intrigue et

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<sup>74</sup> The fact that the Suzannah of the play already knows Mistress Gruff, having worked at and been dismissed from the inn, necessitates a hasty apology on the part of the older woman when the two meet again: 'Je n'en ai pas dormi pendant deux jours, ne sachant pas ce que vous étiez devenu [*sic*]. Vous savez bien comme je suis, mon amour, la tête un peu vive, mais le cœur si tendre !... Voulez-vous me pardonner ?' (LOND2: 33). (In the novel, Clary's sister is Anna, rather than Susannah, and, as such, the girls do not come into contact with the landlady until their kidnapping.)

partant à celle de l'histoire, le mélodrame [...] prend son parti de cette exigence de clôture, inévitable au théâtre où le rideau tombe à la suite d'une série de simplifications et de transmutations qui n'a laissé, au fond du creuset, que des moments cruciaux. (Thomasseau 2000: 189)

To take *Les Mystères de Paris* as an example, Fleur-de-Marie's insoluble anguish and tragic death do not survive the dramatization process: 'Le théâtre ne semble pas admettre de conflits insolubles ; la solution est trouvée dans l'établissement d'un ordre heureux : Fleur-de-Marie vivra heureuse avec son père [...]' (Ripoll 1982: 153).<sup>75</sup>

Similarly, Féval's dramatization has a remarkably different conclusion to that of his novel, in which, although Rio-Santo is shot by Clary MacFarlane, the overriding impression we are left with, and particularly in the following passage, marked by its use of repetition and the present tense, is one of the immortality of his legacy and the distinct possibility of further adventures in the future:

Randal Grahame [...] attend dans la maison de son père. [...]  
 Le cavalier Bembo [...] attend, comme Randal. [...]  
 La comtesse de Derby [...] attend. [...]  
 Ils attendent le retour de celui dont la main tenait la foudre, la résurrection du génie de la tempête – Fergus l'Irlandais [Rio-Santo] – le champion d'une haine immortelle. [...]. (LOND: 408)

The theatre adaptation, on the other hand, is characterized by a saccharine finality. With the arranged marriage between Rio-Santo and Mary Trevor seemingly inevitable, Suzannah resolves to die:

Je suis vaincue... brisée... anéantie ! et je n'essayerai jamais de me relever de ma défaite... Pauvre folle ! les yeux ardemment fixés sur vous, je n'avais pas vu à mes pieds l'abîme qui nous séparait... Maintenant, je le vois, l'abîme ; il m'attend... et je le sais bien, je n'ai plus qu'à mourir ! Je mourrai ! Oh ! je vous le répète, je mourrai ! Cette résolution est trop froidement calculée pour qu'aucune volonté humaine puisse la changer !...

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<sup>75</sup> See also Thomasseau 2002: 13.



[...] Meure, pauvre fille... puisqu'il t'aime ! meure sans regret !... (*Elle se frappe.*). (LOND2: 37-8)

But in the final scene, Suzannah's apparently superficial injury is quickly forgotten, as a letter brought from Dublin absolves Rio-Santo of the political obligation to marry Mary (who can return to Frank Perceval), leaving him free to be with Suzannah:

PERCEVAL, *accourant*.

Quel est le bonheur que me promet cette lettre, milord ?

RIO-SANTO.

O'Connell n'est plus, milord !... son dernier vœu rend la lutte impossible... votre serment, et le mien tombent pour servir nos projets. Vous me donniez la main de votre fille, mais désormais elle peut être heureuse... Je vous rends votre parole... Monsieur Frank, je vous avais bien dit que nous serions amis.

SUZANNAH.

Qu'entends-je ?... Et vous, milord ?

RIO-SANTO.

Moi aussi, je suis heureux, puisque je suis à toi... pour toujours.

(LOND2: 38)

Ripoll, predictably, is critical of the various attempts to add dramatic unity to *Les Mystères de Paris*, attempts which he deems incompatible with the spirit of the *feuilleton* and so destined to end in an unsatisfactory compromise between dramatic and novelistic modes: 'De tels caractères [ceux du feuilleton] s'accordent difficilement avec les exigences du spectacle. Le texte des pièces apparaît alors comme le résultat d'un compromis instable entre les nécessités contraires' (1982: 149). But, as we have seen, the paring down of the narrative in certain areas inevitably entails its elaboration and expansion in others. As Schopp puts it: 'à mesure que s'opèrent contractions et réductions, le drame s'écarte du roman, invente

des scènes nouvelles et nécessaires. L'œuvre dramatique se cherche une évidence propre' (2005: 73).

### **Surface and depth, *mise en abyme***

The dramatic mode, as well as being the source of the technical exigencies discussed above, is also one of the main thematic concerns of Féval's play, as it is of his novel. The play uses dialogue, outward appearance, gesture and other external details to give an impression of exhibition and revelation, but which is more often than not a smokescreen, a means of obscuring hidden depths rather than a genuine revelation. This is prepared in Féval's novel, for example when Susannah is made to perform for an audience of men from behind a curtain (Appendix VIII.6.10), only to discover that the curtain in fact has a series of holes in it, which not only allow her to spy on the waiting audience, and thus assume the role of spectator herself, but also leave her entirely perplexed as to whether she is being exposed to or protected from their gaze:

Je remarquai seulement alors que de très petits trous avaient été pratiqués dans la draperie. En approchant l'œil de ces trous, on voyait parfaitement tout ce qui se passait derrière le rideau. De l'autre côté de la toile, il y avait foule compacte et impatiente ; tous ces gens parlaient à la fois et parlaient de moi. Leurs regards se fixaient si ardemment curieux sur la draperie que je reculai, confuse, comme s'ils eussent pu me voir. (LOND: 199)

As Prendergast remarks in his discussion of melodrama in the Balzacian novel, external detail is characterized by a superficiality and 'staginess' which mean that, ironically, it often serves to confuse and conceal, rather than genuinely exposing anything:

the 'external melodrama of gestures, movement and response'<sup>76</sup> [...] has to be seen as the fictional equivalent of melodramatic theatricality, illustrating a

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<sup>76</sup> Prendergast quotes Lévy (1957: 22).

certain staginess of presentation which prevents the text from penetrating the 'surface', from 'going behind', in James's famous phrase, to the rich, implied life beneath the surface. (1978: 113)

A good example of this insincere 'staginess' is found in Féval's novel, when Paddy O'Chrane distracts attention from his criminal conversation via a self-conscious change of topic delivered in a 'stage whisper':

*Et, changeant de ton tout-à-coup, il ajouta de manière à être entendu d'un bout de Before Lane à l'autre :*

– C'est la vérité, Snail. Ce sont les plus fins qu'on trompe le plus volontiers. Vois, par exemple, cet abject pendeur de Bob, notre bon camarade. Eh bien, Bob est indignement trompé par cette Tempérance dont il est fou. (LOND: 92, my emphasis)

All such references to showing and concealing, to fraudulent performance versus honesty and sincerity, gain a renewed resonance when showcased *en abyme* in the theatre adaptation.<sup>77</sup> The surface-depth dialectic is maintained via dialogue delivered 'haut' and that delivered 'à part'. Physical appearances are, by turns, unambiguously legible and disquietingly deceptive. Donnor's description of his beautiful daughters ('Tu es brune et pâle comme ta mère, Suzannah... (*A Clary.*) Toi, tu ressembles aux anges... Mes enfants !' (LOND2: 28)) indicates a clear correspondence, typical of melodrama, between their attractive outward appearance and inherent moral qualities.<sup>78</sup> Try as they might, the girls are incapable of disguising their true feelings, even when their attempts to do so have entirely benevolent motivations:

SUZANNAH.

Je ne suis pas triste, Clary... regarde-moi sourire.

<sup>77</sup> See Marcandier-Colard: 'Une esthétique dramatique travaille la littérature en général et le théâtre lui-même. Nombreux sont en effet les drames jouant de la mise en abyme, de la spécularité des effets théâtraux' (1998: 200).

<sup>78</sup> As Brooks notes: 'The melodramatic body is a body seized by meaning. Since melodrama's simple, unadulterated messages must be made absolutely clear, visually present, to the audience, bodies of villains and victims must unambiguously identify their status' (1994: 18). See also Pao 1998: 36-7.

CLARY.

Tu souris à travers tes larmes...

(LOND2: 28)

Suzannah only participates in the *comédie* at Perceval's bedside under duress. The girls' innate transparency stands in stark contrast to the dishonest play-acting of a number of other characters. Clary in particular shows herself to be naively inept at reading appearances, and is repeatedly duped by Mistress Gruff's feigned kindness. She not only finds it hard to believe that the landlady could have struck her sister ('Comment a-t-elle pu te frapper, cette femme ? Elle a l'air de t'aimer si bien !' (LOND2: 34)), but actively seeks the woman's company, which she finds positively reassuring:

CLARY.

Il fallait lui dire de rester.

SUZANNAH.

Pourquoi ?

CLARY.

Quand elle est là et que je vois sa figure qui sourit, je n'ai plus peur...

[...]

SUZANNAH, *rêvant*.

As-tu remarqué les regards de cette femme ?

CLARY.

Oh ! oui... De bons yeux souriants... C'est depuis qu'elle est venue que je n'ai plus peur...

SUZANNAH.

Il y avait en elle quelque chose d'étrange...

CLARY.

Tiens ! est-ce que c'est moi qui suis la plus brave, maintenant ?

(LOND2: 35)

One especially key scene which, arguably, is even more successful in the theatre adaptation than in the novel, is the one in which we see Susannah coerced into kissing Frank Perceval at his bedside, following his duel with Rio-Santo. The scene is carefully staged, and Lord Trevor is brought to witness it,<sup>79</sup> so as to scupper his daughter's romantic attachment to Perceval, which threatens to endanger a politically advantageous match with Rio-Santo. The theatricality of this episode is stressed in the novel, with Perceval wondering: 'Quelle était cette femme? Qui l'avait apostée?... Etait-ce le second acte de la tragédie dont le docteur Moore et son aide Rowley avaient joué les premières scènes ?' (LOND: 128), before realizing he has fallen foul of a calculated orchestration: 'Cette femme a joué à mon chevet une perfide et infâme comédie...' (LOND: 282).

If this is a pivotal scene in the novel, it is perhaps in the theatre adaptation that it finds its true resonance. The performance is all the more striking for its being framed, *en abyme*, within the theatre adaptation, and the curtain dividing the two areas of the stage, referred to repeatedly in the stage directions, provides a clear echo of the curtain separating stage and audience:

CINQUIÈME TABLEAU.

Chez Perceval. – Le décor est coupé en deux. – D'un côté, petit salon ; de l'autre, la chambre à coucher de Frank. (LOND2: 19)

*la draperie qui sépare les deux pièces retombe et se ferme derrière le docteur.* (LOND2: 20)

*Donnor recule jusqu'à la draperie en la repoussant, et disparaît dans la chambre de Perceval.* (LOND2: 23)

As a result, there are frequently two groups of spectators, both those within the play, and those watching the play itself, and the reactions of the former inevitably

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<sup>79</sup> Mary herself witnesses the scene in the play.

condition the responses of the latter. As Marcandier-Colard notes with regard to crowd scenes in romantic fiction:

La foule est un public. Elle offre à l'écrivain un premier cercle de spectateurs de la scène représentée. Ainsi, décrire une foule [...] ne revient pas à poser un simple décor humain. C'est au contraire, déjà, une manière de travailler la réception de la scène. (1998: 176)<sup>80</sup>

On a couple of occasions, the boundaries between these two groups of spectators are particularly indistinct. Both Lady Campbell and Lady Brompton make explicit references to their awareness of being observed and urge discretion on the part of their interlocutors:

MARY.

Frank Perceval ! (*Lady Campbell et Mary répriment un mouvement.*)

LADY CAMPBELL, *se remettant.*

Vous avez fait un bon voyage, Perceval ?

PERCEVAL.

Madame... je...

LADY CAMPBELL, *bas en se rapprochant de lui.*

Pas ici... pas maintenant, je vous en conjure... *On a les yeux sur nous.*

(LOND2: 11, my emphasis in final line)

LADY BROMPTON.

Venez tantôt reprendre vos diamants, prince... venez vous-même... je vous remercierai plus à l'aise.

TOLSTOÏ, *avec chaleur.*

J'irai... mais ce sera pour vous dire...

LADY BROMPTON.

*On nous observe.*

(LOND2: 12, my emphasis in final line)

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<sup>80</sup> On the crowd as a *mise en abyme* of readers/spectators (in romantic fiction), see also Marcandier-Colard 1998: 178.

The effect is one of metalepsis: as spectators, we are left unsure whether the prying eyes of which the ladies are so wary are those of other characters within the play, or in fact our own. In this way, the *mise en abyme* forces the spectator to acknowledge his dual status. Like the characters in Féval's play, he is both a subject and an object of urban spectatorship.<sup>81</sup> The implication is that theatre adaptations of the *mystères urbains*, or indeed any incarnation of the *mystères*, must be seen as an integral part of city life, as well as a representation of it.<sup>82</sup>

The blurring of the subject-object division is underlined by the character of Gérard in Féval's theatre adaptation. Frank Perceval's reacquaintance with his friend takes place at a ceremony at Saint James's Palace, which is described by Perceval in fittingly theatrical terms:

Quant au personnel du palais, *c'est encore pure parade...* Sa Majesté fait comme ses fidèles sujets... Elle loue à tant par heure *les comparses de cette vieille comédie...* Avez-vous vu les hallebardiers et les massiers, sous le péristyle ?

[...]

Ils vont venir, après le défilé des carrosses, *jouer leur rôle* et faire la baie... Vous allez voir leurs costumes du temps de Jacques II !

(LOND2: 10, my emphases)

This first appearance by Gérard is significant. As Perceval's best friend, he fulfils a role very similar to that of Stephen MacNab in the novel, and yet our introduction to the character also points to a certain metatheatrical resonance:

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<sup>81</sup> The notion of subject-object reversal is explored extensively by Gill (2009) (see for example, 156, 160, 161, 162, 166, 167), and particularly with reference to the *flâneur*: 'For French types such as the *flâneur*, *badaud*, and *homme de lettres*, urban life functioned as a permanent exhibition. Such figures were not merely observers like the guards in Bentham's panopticon or government spies. *They were simultaneously subject and object, participants in the Parisian drama in their own right and material for the observation of others*' (2009: 140, my emphasis). Shields agrees that '[t]he *flâneur* is out to see and be seen, and thus requires a crowd to be able to watch others and take in the bustle of the city in the security of his anonymous status as part of the metropolitan throng. The crowd is also an audience' (1994: 65).

<sup>82</sup> On the importance of the public gaze to Parisian life, see Gill 2009, especially 43-70.

PERCEVAL.

Par quel hasard, hasard heureux pour moi, vous trouvé-je ici, dans le palais de Saint-James ?

GERARD.

Par le hasard qui conduit les touristes partout là où il y a quelque chose d'inconnu à voir, de curieux à observer... J'ai appris qu'il y avait aujourd'hui baise-main à Saint-James, et ma foi, je n'ai pas voulu perdre une si belle occasion.

[...]

Mais voici, je crois, les hallebardiers. C'est le commencement du spectacle que je suis venu chercher ici. (*Les hallebardiers entrent.*) Ils sont fort bien... très-bien, sur ma parole... Du Louis XIV tout pur...

(LOND2: 10-1)

Given that he is not only an enthusiastic spectator of the 'baise-main'<sup>83</sup> ceremony but also, as Perceval points out, a Frenchman in London, the parallels between this character and the spectators of Féval's play are clear. Simultaneously observer and observed, as well as being a Frenchman like the spectator, Gérard personifies the conflation of subject and object.

In much the same way that it blurs the boundaries between character and spectator, the dramatic mode also cultivates affinities between the author and the public. The reader's involvement in creating meaning in a written text is explained by Iser:

In [the reading] process there disappears the subject-object division essential for all cognition and perception, and this is what makes literature a unique means of access to new experiences. [...] Reading removes the subject-object division, and so the reader becomes occupied by the author's thoughts.  
(Iser 1978: 154-5)<sup>84</sup>

<sup>83</sup> The link made here between the 'baiser' (kiss) and the performance no doubt prefigures the scene to follow at Perceval's bedside.

<sup>84</sup> See also Marcandier-Colard: 'la relation de l'écrivain à son sujet n'est plus simple *mimesis* mais dialectique, c'est-à-dire « moyen de créer et de transformer la perception ». [...] « Dans la triade formée par l'auteur, l'œuvre et le public, celui-ci n'est pas un simple élément passif qui ne ferait que réagir en chaîne : il développe à son tour une énergie qui contribue à faire l'histoire. » [Jauss 1978: 40 and 44-5]' (1998: 6); 'Le plaisir pris à la lecture ne naît pas d'une contemplation passive mais d'une participation émotionnelle. Le lecteur n'est pas seulement spectateur, il crée un texte [...]' (Marcandier-Colard 1998: 188). The spectator's implication in the creation of the text reminds us, inevitably, of the agency of the reader discussed in IV.3 above.



This loss of the subject-object division is central to Iser's notion of 'performances' of meaning' (1978: 27 and 47). Performance thus provides an apt analogy for the reader's engagement with the literary work,<sup>85</sup> during which meaning emerges as an event or 'dynamic happening' (Iser 1978: 22) rather than a single, pre-defined entity: 'As text and reader [...] merge into a single situation, the division between subject and object no longer applies, and [...] meaning is no longer an object to be defined, but is an *effect* to be experienced' (Iser 1978: 9-10, my emphasis).

The use of the same analogy by other theorists is testament to its aptness. McKenzie, for example, explains a concept of the text whereby 'the work [...] may be a form [...] conceived of as always potential, *like that of a play*, where the text is open and generates new meanings according to new needs in a perpetual deferral of closure' (1999: 37, my emphasis). The text is thus 'always incomplete, and therefore open, unstable, subject to a perpetual re-making by its readers, performers, or audience' (1999: 55).

If 'performances' of meaning' provide an apt description of our encounters with literature in general, the performance analogy is especially fitting in the context of works of popular literature such as the *mystères urbains*, which, as Cawelti explains, depend on the 'intensification of a familiar experience' (1976: 10).<sup>86</sup> A given formula is made familiar to us by its repetition,<sup>87</sup> but must be slightly different

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<sup>85</sup> The analogy would appear to be based in the fact that, as Donoghue remarks, 'collaboration of the audience with the artist [...] is necessary in art *and most obviously in dramatic art*' (1983: 53, my emphasis). On the 'problem peculiar to theater – the relationship of the text and the performance', see also Pao (1998: 4).

<sup>86</sup> Intriguingly, Stählin uses very similar terms to describe the nature of religious mystery: 'The divine mystery is not the communication of supernatural knowledge; it is not the announcement of transcendent ideas [...] The mystery is an actual *event* [...]' (1937: 17, my emphasis).

<sup>87</sup> Significantly, *répétition* is, of course, the French word for rehearsal.

in each individual work, which becomes like a unique performance of the same dramatic text, if it is to maintain its appeal:

In [formulaic] literature, the relationship between individual work and formula is somewhat analogous to that of a variation to a theme, or of a performance to a text. To be a work of any quality or interest, the individual version of a formula must have some unique or special characteristics of its own, yet these characteristics must ultimately work toward the fulfillment of the conventional form. (Cawelti 1976: 10)

Dramatizations of the *mystères urbains*, then, as well as creating the effects discussed above, must also be seen as a sustained analogy of the balance between familiarity and variation which characterized all transformations of Sue's text. The relationship between a single dramatic text and the unique, variable performances of it is clearly comparable to the relationship between a hypotext and the hypertextual transformations it inspires.

This examination of Féval's theatre adaptation of *Les Mystères de Londres* brings us to several interesting conclusions. As well as offering a pertinent analogy for the balance between repetition and variation which is at the heart of all hypertextual transformation, theatre adaptations of the *mystères urbains* also clearly functioned in very specific ways to achieve their effects. Simplifications pertaining to time, place and setting, typical of the dramatic mode, necessitated changes in other areas of the narrative, likely to have been the source of new 'mysteries' for the spectator, given his knowledge of the hypotext and the expectations he brought to the play as a consequence.

The dramatic mode is also used to showcase the interplay between surface and depth and the theatricality *en abyme* characteristic of life in nineteenth-century Paris. Indeed, for Genette, this is the main strength of the dramatic mode, lacking as it is in textual resources in comparison to the novel:

On observe [...] dans le passage du récit à la représentation dramatique, une considérable déperdition de moyens textuels, car [...] tout ce que peut le théâtre, le récit le peut aussi, et sans réciproque. Mais cette infériorité textuelle est compensée par un immense gain extratextuel : celui que procure ce que Barthes nommait la *théâtralité* (« le théâtre moins le texte ») proprement dite : spectacle et jeu. (1982: 399)

The multiple instances of *mise en abyme* in Féval's play highlight the proximity of subject and object which characterized urban spectatorship in all its forms. As observer and observed become increasingly difficult to differentiate, the reader finds himself invited to interrogate urban life itself, as much as its representation. In Iser's words, when the subject-object division has been eliminated from literature:

when we 'awaken' to the real world, this division seems all the more accentuated. Suddenly we find ourselves detached from our world, to which we are inextricably tied, and able to perceive it as an object. [...] we can view our own world as a thing "freshly understood". (1978: 140)

Indeed, it was the power of the dramatic mode to direct the spectator's gaze away from the text and onto the city itself which made the theatre subject to such stringent censorship at this time. While a study of the impact of censorship on Féval's dramatization would certainly be welcome,<sup>88</sup> my emphasis on hypertextuality compels me to leave my own investigations here, in order to give due consideration to another type of transformation. Two parodic versions of *Les Mystères de Paris* will form the focus of the final section of this chapter.

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<sup>88</sup> On the censorship of the dramatization of *Les Mystères de Paris*, see Galvan 2002 and Krakovitch 2005.



### VI.3 – THE ‘CARNIVALESQUE’ AND THE CONSERVATIVE:

#### PARODY AS PALIMPSEST

Parody flourished in nineteenth-century France, particularly under the July Monarchy and the Second Empire. A burgeoning group of humorous press publications provided a forum for the practice which, along with satire and caricature, was an important means of political resistance (Sangsue 2007: 39). Parodies of popular fiction were encouraged in no small part by the sheer volume of *feuilletons* produced, as well as by the pre-eminence of both the popular press which published them, and the popular theatre which sought to capitalize on their success. In the latter half of the century, the Romantic association of artistic inspiration and genius with individuality and originality increasingly gave way to practices of rewriting and imitation (Sangsue 2007: 40). As such, parodies continued to proliferate until, by the end of the century, the practice was ‘inéluctable’ (Sangsue 2007: 44).

According to Delepierre (1868-9), the reception of a work was integral to parodic versions of it. His argument was that, if satire (targeting individuals, groups or institutions) was more common than parody (targeting texts) in the Middle Ages, this was because no individual work was sufficiently well-known to merit a parody of it: ‘[s]e penchant sur le Moyen Âge, [Delepierre] affirme qu’aux onzième et douzième siècles la satire [...] l’emporte sur la parodie dans la mesure où aucune œuvre littéraire n’est assez célèbre pour qu’on la parodie’ (Sangsue 2007: 44). The nineteenth century, in contrast to the Middle Ages evoked by Delepierre, saw a number of works capture the public attention, and a resultant wave of parodies. Hugo’s *Hernani*, which was met with huge controversy when first performed in

1830, and inspired a glut of parodies, is a good example of the new levels of celebrity attained by individual works. Sue's *Mystères de Paris* exemplified the celebrity achieved by works of popular fiction and, as such, was an especially rich source for parodists.

In this section, I shall refer to two parodies of *Les Mystères de Paris*, which I have identified as particularly interesting case studies, due to their different forms. *Paris dévoilé ou les mystères sus* (hereafter referenced as CHAM) is a parodic, illustrated review of Sue's serial, by the caricaturist Cham (the pseudonym of Amédée-Charles-Henry de Noé), which appeared in the 25th, 30th, 34th, 41st and 46th *livraisons* of the *Musée ou Magasin Comique de Philippon* (Tillier 2003: 82). Aron and Espagnon describe the *Musée Philippon* as one of 'quelques revues éphémères purement parodiques et d'une qualité exceptionnelle' (2009: 21) and underline the rarity of prose parodies:

La parodie en prose d'œuvres en prose est très rare, sauf en ce qui concerne Hugo ; rien ou presque rien concernant Stendhal, Balzac et George Sand. La parodie du *Juif errant* (par Cham-Philippon), sous forme de roman illustré, semble être la seule, de grand public et de gros format, paru au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle ; *Les Mystères Sus* des mêmes a été publié dans le *Musée Philippon* en 1852. (2009: 23)<sup>89</sup>

I thereby take issue with Witkowski's dismissal of this text as 'une parodie [...] sans grand intérêt' (1992: 175) and seek to demonstrate how the text functions as a parody of Sue's text (in its prose form in particular), as well as of the text's reception. Given that criticism is implicit in parody,<sup>90</sup> and the review genre is one we

<sup>89</sup> This date would appear to be an error. As Tillier explains, the publication of Cham's parody was contemporaneous with that of Sue's serial (2003: 82).

<sup>90</sup> As Sangsue explains, 'la parodie implique fondamentalement une *relation critique* à l'objet parodié. La démarche du parodiste est en effet semblable à celle du critique : il choisit une œuvre, juge de ses qualités et de ses défauts, en propose une interprétation, mais tout cela *en acte*, dans un « commentaire » qui se traduit par une réécriture ou une recreation de cette œuvre' (2007: 11, emphases in original). See also Dentith 2000: 16. Aron and Espagnon also discuss parody as critical

associate with *explicit* criticism, the prospect of a parodic review is an especially interesting one. If implicit criticism is made explicit, then we might expect to see a similar self-conscious foregrounding of other strategies. The notion of self-consciousness in these parodies is one to which I will return.

The other text I refer to is a theatrical parody: *Les Mystères de Passy, parodie-vaudeville en onze tableaux, cinq actes avec prologue et epilogue*, by Rochefort and Artois, first performed at the théâtre des Folies-dramatiques, on 5 March 1844 (PASSY).<sup>91</sup> Theatrical parody is a very different prospect to prose parody. As Travers explains, '[t]heatrical parody was such a popular genre [...] that it sometimes served as a sort of guide to the success of the parodied work. Newspapers frequently spoke of a play as having obtained "les honneurs de la parodie"' (1941: Foreword). Like Cham's parodic review, theatrical parodies were concerned with the reception of the source text, but they were particularly opportunistic, in that, by capitalizing on the popularity of the theatrical mode and toning down controversial aspects of Sue's text via mockery, they played a key role in its continued popularity.<sup>92</sup>

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commentary, and take issue with Genette's description of hypertextuality as '[un texte greffé sur un autre] d'une manière qui n'est pas celle du commentaire' (Genette 1982: 13): 'Remarquons que cette dernière partie de la définition souffre quelques exceptions: d'assez nombreuses parodies commentent [...]' (Aron and Espagnon 2009: 20).

<sup>91</sup> Note that Travers (1941: 98-9) lists a number of other theatrical parodies of Sue's novel or its theatre adaptation, including the anonymous *La revue des mystères sus ou le Prince Don Quichotte de Gérolstein, parodie des Mystères de Paris*, par Bradamanti, Muffle, Grogne, Martial, Calebasse, le Squelette, la Louve, Bras-Rouge, David, et les autres personnages proscrits de la Porte Saint-Martin par la censure, Paris (Cazel), 1844 and *Les Petits mystères de Paris*, vaudeville en 3 actes et six tableaux, par [Charles-Désiré] Dupeuty et Cormon; Variétés, 28 décembre 1842. He also refers to two parodies which appear to have been performed but not printed: *Les Mystères des Mystères de Paris*, parodie en 3 tableaux [Anonymous]; autorisation de la Censure pour le Théâtre du Luxembourg, 7 mars 1844, and *Les Mésaventures du prince Rodolphe*, parodie en 5 actes, par Charles Monselet; Variétés, Bordeaux, 25 mai 1846. Censorship documentation would appear to be the main source of our knowledge, certainly of the former play: 'L'auteur ayant substitué au titre primitif *Les Clustères de Paris* celui des *Mystères des Mystères de Paris* et ayant supprimé un très grand nombre de détails, nous pensons que l'autorisation peut être accordée' (Procès-verbal de la Censure).

<sup>92</sup> On the specificity of theatrical parody, see also Dousteyssier-Khoze 2007.

In terms of definitions, those I will work with in this section are deliberately broad ones, such as that of Sangsue: ‘soucieux d’offrir un concept opératoire et d’élargir la définition donnée dans *Palimpsestes*, je définis la parodie comme « la transformation comique, ludique ou satirique d’un texte singulier »’ (2007: 14 and 104).<sup>93</sup> Such inclusive definitions are useful for two main reasons. First, they invite us to consider parody as part of a range or continuum of practices. I have already touched on the aptness of this notion, and the way in which it invites us to reconsider the traditional distinctions made between ‘popular’ and ‘literary’ fiction,<sup>94</sup> and shall return to it again in my conclusions:

This sense of a ‘spectrum’ or continuum of cultural practices is perhaps the most important conclusion to be drawn [from the numerous definitions of parody]. ‘Parody’ should be thought of, not as a single and tightly definable genre or practice, but as a range of cultural practices which are all more or less parodic. (Dentith 2000: 19)

Broad definitions, by dint of their inclusiveness, will also prevent me from being side-tracked by questions of definition, which threaten to upstage a number of rather more pertinent questions raised by parodic texts. As Sangsue puts it: ‘l’essentiel n’est pas dans la pertinence de l’emploi ou dans la signification exacte du mot « parodie », mais dans la vision du monde à laquelle cette notion renvoie’ (2007: 67).<sup>95</sup> My approach to parody will therefore take me away from questions of classification, allowing me instead to give due consideration to the specific ways in

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<sup>93</sup> See also the broad definitions provided by Hutcheon (1985: 30-49) and Rose (1979: 17-55).

<sup>94</sup> See VI.1 above.

<sup>95</sup> Dentith agrees that ‘the discussion of parody is bedevilled by disputes over definition, a fruitless form of argument unless there are matters of substance at stake – of genuine differences of cultural politics, for example’ (2000: 6). Thus Genette’s classification, while impressive in scope, must also be seen as lacking, neglecting as it does the question of socio-historical contexts: ‘the chief merit of Genette’s work – the construction of a classification based on formally distinguished textual operations – is also its principal disadvantage. In the context of a more general account of parody as a possible mode of linguistic or textual interaction, Genette’s account is helpful in focusing on the diverse textual operations that can characterise that interaction, but loses sight of the social and historical ground in which that interaction occurs, and the evaluative and ideological work performed by parody’ (Dentith 2000: 14).



which the parodic texts in my corpus function, to ask why parody was an especially apt way of transforming Sue's text and what it was about both the historical moment and the social situation, i.e. the nineteenth-century city, which provided both the publication context and the subject matter for *Les Mystères de Paris*, which meant that this text lent itself so well to parody.<sup>96</sup> In order to explain the structure I have given to this final section of my study, I will now turn to the notion of the 'parodic paradox'.

### **The 'parodic paradox'**

There is an ambiguity inherent to parodic texts, which invites us to see them as exemplary hypertextual transformations. Just as the palimpsest is characterized by ambiguous impulses of destruction and preservation, so parody is, in Sangsue's words, 'un composé de familier et d'étrange' (2007: 19). The irony is that, if a given parody is to subvert its hypotext, it is obliged to 'buy in' to the features of that hypotext, to reiterate and thereby preserve the very elements it would appear to be challenging.

This so-called 'parodic paradox' has been widely acknowledged by critics and theorists, with continual reference to the processes of destruction, preservation and superimposition associated with the palimpsest. Sangsue (2007) explores the paradox in some detail, invoking first Rose (1979), for whom parody is:

une pratique fondamentalement ambivalente, comportant simultanément un désir d'imitation et une volonté de changement, une relation de dépendance et d'indépendance à l'égard de son objet [...]. Le texte parodié est ainsi à la fois une cible d'attaque et un matériau que le parodiste fait refonctionner dans un nouveau but [...] l'équilibre entre une imitation ou une citation

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<sup>96</sup> On the question of the specific historical circumstances and social situations which are conducive to parody, see Dentith 2000: 22 and 28. See also Sangsue 2007: 44-5.

proches et un remplacement (« *supersession* ») du texte cible, accompagné d'un effet comique. (Sangsue 2007: 77)

Sangsue goes on to point out the same paradox, as identified by Hutcheon: 'Even in mocking, parody reinforces; in formal terms, it inscribes the mocked conventions onto itself, thereby guaranteeing their continued existence' (1985: 75).<sup>97</sup> As Sangsue concludes:

Il faut donc prendre acte du statut contradictoire de la parodie, qui peut paraître conservatrice en ce qu'elle reproduit des modèles qui font autorité, et révolutionnaire dans la mesure où elle le fait en les détournant, en introduisant de la différence dans la continuité. (2007: 83-4)<sup>98</sup>

Dentith provides a helpful illustration of the phenomenon, explaining how Cervantes's classic parody *Don Quixote* 'preserves the very chivalric romances that it attacks – with the unexpected result that for much of its history the novel has been read as a celebration of misplaced idealism rather than a satire of it' (2000: 37).<sup>99</sup>

The parodic paradox is reflected in the etymology of the term 'parody'. While Delepierre (1868-9) tells us that *parodier* is composed of '*para* et *ôdé*' and thus means '*contre-chant*' (Sangsue 2007: 30), the meaning is, in actual fact, rather less clear-cut. Sangsue reiterates the observations I have already made about the ambiguity of the 'para-' prefix:<sup>100</sup> '*Para*, nous l'avons vu, signifie à la fois « à côté »

<sup>97</sup> Indeed, Hutcheon devotes a whole chapter to 'The paradox of parody' (1985: 69-83).

<sup>98</sup> Hannoosh (1989) agrees that 'la parodie contribue à fixer les conventions auxquelles elle s'attaque' (Sangsue 2007: 90). Sangsue notes that for Barthes (1970) the parodic paradox is part of the dishonest, sham nature of the mode: 'Sous couvert d'une (fausse) distance, la parodie, pour Barthes, ne fait que renforcer le discours qu'elle semble mettre en question' (2007: 25). Barthes pursues this idea in *Le Plaisir du texte* (1973a).

<sup>99</sup> On the parodic paradox in burlesque drama ('[i]n attacking one form, the writers of burlesque have succeeded in creating another that only exists by virtue of its antagonistic relationship to the genre they wish to mock'), see Dentith (2000: 135).

<sup>100</sup> See quotation p. 27 (Miller 1979: 219). On accusations of parasitism (reminiscent of those levelled against paraliterature), see Dentith 2000: 30, 159 and 189 and Sangsue 2007: 24. This must be seen as one reason for the supposed prevalence of parody in popular-cultural forms, especially from the nineteenth century, as discussed by Docker 1994 and Dentith 2000: 157-160.

et « contre ». L'étymologie renvoie donc déjà à cette combinaison de proximité et de distance qui est à la base de la parodie' (2007: 107).<sup>101</sup>

In the remainder of this chapter, I will deconstruct the notion of the 'parodic paradox', analysing first the subversive elements of my chosen parodies, drawing on notions of 'carnavalesque' parody established by Bakhtin and by the Russian Formalists before him, and then the conservative elements of the texts, with reference to Hutcheon (1985) and Rose (1979). I will show how these contradictory impulses are showcased particularly well in parodies of *Les Mystères de Paris*, and how these parodies shed light on both these texts in particular and the processes of hypertextual transformation in general. Throughout these analyses I will also consider, with reference to Rose (1979), the recurrent metafictional overtones of the parodies, and show how the self-consciousness inherent to the mystery narrative<sup>102</sup> is given a new lease of life in the *mystères urbains*, which become preoccupied with the unveiling and exhibiting of their own devices, rather than of diegetic mysteries. I will be mindful throughout of acknowledging the crucial differences between the two types of parody analysed and the implications of these differences for my interpretation of the texts.

### **The 'carnavalesque'**

The Russian Formalists saw parody as a practice at once destructive and creative, as Hutcheon explains: 'Parody can certainly be disruptive and destabilizing; it is as such that the Russian Formalists gave it its major role in the evolution of literary forms' (1985: 101). In the wake of the Formalists, the notion of parody as a subversive mode was most famously posited by Bakhtin in *Rabelais and His World*

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<sup>101</sup> See also Hutcheon 1985: 32.

<sup>102</sup> See II.1 above.

(1984b [1968]). Taking the Renaissance scholar as his example, Bakhtin argued that parody, in late medieval and Early Modern Europe in particular, was linked to the popular institution of the carnival, ‘its celebratory enactments of the overthrowing of authority, and its militantly anti-authoritarian debunking of sacred and official rituals and languages’ (Dentith 2000: 22-23).<sup>103</sup> Parodic versions of religious ceremonies were common, as was *parodia sacra*, or the parody of sacred texts, as well as of the mysteries (Dentith 2000: 21 and 51; Sangsue 2007: 71).<sup>104</sup> Parody was thus central to the earliest mystery narratives.

As Sangsue explains, ‘[l]’esprit du carnaval consistait à inverser le haut et le bas, à produire un « monde à l’envers » (à transformer le roi en bouffon ou le bouffon en roi, par exemple)’ (2007: 72).<sup>105</sup> This could actually be a description of *Les Mystères de Paris* itself, or, indeed, to other, non-parodic versions of it. The ‘elevation’ of the urban poor, previously deemed unworthy subject matter, in these texts points to the presence of a parodic, ‘carnavalesque’ impulse, even before any hypertextual transformation occurs. As if to acknowledge the inversion inherent to the *mystères*, carnival scenes abound in the texts. The most obvious example is the carnival during which the Chourineur is killed while attempting to protect Rodolphe and Fleur-de-Marie as they leave Paris (MP: 1235-45). Another example is the carnivalesque revelry which marks the opening of Aimard’s *Invisibles de Paris* (INV: 3-35).<sup>106</sup>

This thematic inversion also has extra-diegetic implications:

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<sup>103</sup> See also Dentith 2000: 79.

<sup>104</sup> On the mixture of serious and comic elements in mystery plays, see Beaumarchais and Couty 1994: 1348 and France 1995: 552-3.

<sup>105</sup> See also Vareille: ‘le Carnaval, c’est la Fête, c’est-à-dire la Vie transformée en Jeu lequel à son tour, se relie volontiers à la duplication et reduplication, soit à l’impossibilité de distinguer l’être du paraître, le fond de l’apparence, métaphoriquement : le haut du bas, le sérieux du comique, l’important du dérisoire, la vérité de la fiction’ (1989: 94).

<sup>106</sup> On the ‘application of carnivalization to the portrayal of contemporary reality and contemporary everyday life’ in nineteenth-century social-adventure novels, especially those of Soulié and Sue, see Bakhtin (1984a: 158).

Dans le carnaval, les rôles se renversent ainsi que les registres, les acteurs deviennent spectateurs, le monde se fait scène : le carnaval est un [...] forme de *theatrum mundi*, de renversement de l'illusion et du réel, du sérieux et du ludique. (Marcandier-Colard 1998: 219)

I have remarked a number of such inversions throughout the course of this study: of fact and fiction, text and paratext (III), of male and female, writer and reader (IV.3), and of subject and object or observer and observed (VI.2). Decidedly, then, even the *mystères* which are not overtly parodic are characterized nonetheless by a subversive inclination.

Such inversions are all the more emphatic in the parodic texts, where honesty and criminality are repeatedly inverted. In *Les Mystères de Passy*, for example, it is Pandolphe (the 'Rodolphe' character) who is revealed to have a 'criminal' past, although his crime is an amusing one, and its revelation drawn out in typical *feuilleton* style to ensure maximum comedic effect. A dentist by trade, Pandolphe is asked by his godfather to remove a painful tooth. Angered by the latter's opposition to his relationship with Sara Mic-Mac-Gogo (the 'Sarah Mac-Gregor' character), Pandolphe deliberately removes a healthy tooth (Appendix VIII.6.11).

The following exchange between Pandolphe and Gourand (Ferrand) makes the inversion of *bons* and *méchants* even more explicit. In Sue's text, it is Ferrand who is responsible for a series of 'abus de confiance', which are uncovered by Rodolphe, but in *Passy*, the tables are turned, and the same charge levelled by Gourand at Pandolphe, who has run away to Monaco rather than fulfilling a promise of marriage to Sara:

PANDOLPHE.

Sara Mic-Mac-Gogo !... Vous connaissez Mic-Mac-Gogo ?

GOURAND, à part.

Nous y voilà !... (Haut.) Certainement, *elle avait autrefois donné sa confiance à un... polisson... qui en a drôlement abusé...*

[...]

Et je suis autorisé à vous déclarer que c'est... vous !

PANDOLPHE.

Voilà un des mystères découvert !... Ah ! Mic-Mac-Gogo !... Gogo... que tu me fais de mal...<sup>107</sup>

GOURAND.

Un mariage avait été promis à cette pudique demoiselle de comptoir, et vous avez négligé cette formalité en vous sauvant dans la principauté de Monaco !...

(PASSY: 22, my emphasis)

The following example extends the confusion engendered by such inversions to the characters themselves. Pandolphe's new criminal acquaintances think they have heard the term 'mufle !' (a colloquial term meaning 'goujat' i.e. boor or lout), to which they respond, when in fact Pandolphe is calling for Muffe (the 'Murph' character):

PANDOLPHE.

[...] (Il appelle.) Muffe !...

TOUS TROIS.

Hein ?...

PANDOLPHE.

Quoi ?...

RIPAILLON.

J'ai cru que nous nous appeliez !...

PANDOLPHE.

Eh ! non !... Muffe !... c'est mon domestique...

(PASSY: 5-6)

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<sup>107</sup> Pandolphe's desire to preserve, rather than resolve, mystery, is reminiscent of Marcel's oscillation between the roles of hunter and hunt saboteur in Boisgobey's *Mystères du nouveau Paris*, discussed in IV.1 above.

In Cham's text, inversions are highlighted by the oxymoronic descriptions of Germain as 'l'honnête voleur' (CHAM: 141) and Fleur-de-Marie as 'l'innocente prostituée' (139) who 'adorant la vertu [...] s'était jetée dans les bras du vice' (93). Similarly in *Passy*, when Rizette (Rigolette) tells Pandolphe that she met la Gouailleuse (la Goualeuse) in prison, he not only tells her that her criminal past is not a problem for him, but goes so far as to say that it is even a mark of distinction:

PANDOLPHE.

On vous a arrêtées !...

LE SOURINEUR.

Dame !... la police est si susceptible !...

LA GOUAILLEUSE.

Est-ce que ça vous fait de la peine que j'ai été aux Madelonettes ?...

PANDOLPHE.

Par exemple !... pour qui me prenez-vous ?...

Ceci vous distingue... vous complète à mes yeux !...

J'ai pour principe qu'un peu de prison ne fait pas mal dans la vie de l'innocence.

(PASSY: 13)

Here, the parodies seem to be drawing attention to the flawed logic of the hypotext. The suggestion is that Sue's championing of criminals is entirely absurd. Here, then, an apparently carnivalesque inversion actually disguises a stronger, conservative impulse. It is, in fact, the hypotext which turns notions of good and bad on their head, and the parodies of Sue's text, by exposing his socialist inclinations as entirely illogical, which are ultimately conservative.

The inversions could also be said to be conservative in that they seem preoccupied with negating Sue's model, rather than proposing a new one.<sup>108</sup> In

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<sup>108</sup> See my discussion of Bourdieu's notion of the '*illusio* du champ artistique' (IV.2 above) and my remarks on 'negative pragmatics' in Lermina's *Mystère-ville* (V.3 above). On parody as 'negative imitation', see also Rose (1979: 66).

Cham's text, at the start of an episode which takes place in Ferrand's study, we are told: 'Revenons à l'étude ; l'auteur en a fait une lanterne magique dans laquelle viendront se dessiner les silhouettes amusantes' (CHAM: 132). While the numerous references to the text as a 'lanterne magique', and the accompanying illustrations in silhouette (examples of which are shown in Figure 7), are used by Cham to evoke the contrived and insubstantial nature of the hypotext,<sup>109</sup> they could also be interpreted as an acknowledgement of the limitations of the parody itself, which condenses, criticizes and corrects the hypotext, but never actually departs from its model, instead repeatedly exploiting the very same strategies it purports to denigrate. The confusion engendered by such schematic inversions is laid bare by the silhouettes shown in Figure 7. These are used to suggest similarities between Rigolette (top left, Figure 7) and the dark-skinned Cecily (top right, Figure 7).<sup>110</sup> As a result, the image of the flirtatious but benevolent Rodolphe looking at Rigolette (bottom, Figure 7), reminds us of the sinister Ferrand watching Cecily (discussed in III.3 above).<sup>111</sup>

The 'carnavalesque' does, however, at times go beyond mere criticism of the hypotext to create something genuinely new. The repeated use of mirrors to signpost and symbolize the inversion is a good example of this. Bakhtin refers to early carnivalesque parody as having resembled 'an entire system of crooked mirrors, elongating, diminishing, distorting in various directions and to various

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<sup>109</sup> 'Il raille la multiplication des personnages aux identités troubles et compliquées, qui font du roman-feuilleton une lanterne magique qui « sert à introduire des personnages nouveaux » - « dans laquelle viendront se dessiner des silhouettes amusantes », dépourvues de toute épaisseur' (Tillier 2003: 84).

<sup>110</sup> Cecily's mixed race is not obvious in Figures 3 and 4.

<sup>111</sup> The evocations of night, darkness and other 'negatives' such as 'des « trous », [...] des « ombres » et [...] des « silhouettes »' also make up a negative imaginary which, especially in juxtaposition with evocations of day and light, is, according to Hamon, characteristic of 'modern' texts: 'De nombreux textes romanesques « modernes » (Flaubert, Goncourt, Hugo, Zola...) déroulent [...] leurs intrigues selon une succession de scènes de jour et de scènes nocturnes, en tableaux alternés, ce qui est le procédé fondamental des lanternes magiques et des premières machines à projeter des images (dioramas, panoramas), qui faisaient se succéder des vues tour à tour nocturnes et diurnes des mêmes paysages' (2001: 298). See also Hamon 2001: 293-8.



degrees' (1984a: 127). As Vareille explains, the mirror encapsulates the ambiguous mix of *familier* and *étrange* which is characteristic of parody (and indeed palimpsest):

cette image que me renvoie la glace, c'est moi, [...], mais, dans le même temps, ce n'est pas moi – puisqu'une distance s'est établie entre elle et moi, puisque je me vois comme objet : à l'identité se mêle donc une dose d'étrangeté et même d'inquiétante étrangeté, qu'il va falloir exorciser d'une façon ou de l'autre. Ce mixte d'admission/refus s'appelle *l'ironie*. (1989: 92)

Margaret Rose, in her seminal *Parody/Meta-Fiction* (1979),<sup>112</sup> makes a very similar point, substituting Vareille's notions of *familier* and *étrange* with those of 'reflection' and 'distortion': '[the] function [of the parodic mirror] is to distort that which it is assumed to reflect – the mirror held up to another literary work [...] by the parodist, is not simply 'mimetic' but 'dialectical' in its effect' (1979: 72). So in scenes such as the following one from *Passy*, where Criquelet (Pipelet) struggles to shave in front of a mirror moved by the mischievous Gambrillard (Tortillard), the text could be said to be acknowledging its own parodic status:

Je fais ma barbe... (il se place au fond devant un petit miroir accroché près des carreaux de papier, et se regarde dedans en tournant le dos au public. Le miroir remue.)

[...]

(Il va continuer, le miroir remue plus fort. Criquelet, étonné, recule.) Ah ça ! qu'est-ce que ça veut donc dire ?... Ma figure danse toute seule à présent ?... Est-ce qu'il y a des vents coulis ?

(PASSY: 16)

A mirror is held up to Sue's text, but also to the reader/spectator, who, via a deliberate confusion of the objective and the subjective, the world of the reader and

<sup>112</sup> On parody as a metafictional practice, see also Hutcheon 1985: 20 and 31 and Sangsue 2007: 76-9.

the world of the text (Rose 1979: 68),<sup>113</sup> is impelled to question his reading activity and adopt a more critical stance.

This scene occurs within a longer ‘reflection’ around which the entire play is structured. In the first act of *Les Mystères de Passy*, tavern clients sing ‘Servez du vin, Versez soudain !’ (PASSY: 6). This wordplay, using repeated consonants, rhyme and assonance, to create a mirror-like effect, marks the start of a dream sequence from which Pandolphe will only emerge in the epilogue, which has, according to the stage directions, ‘[le] [m]ême décor que le Prologue’. Pandolphe realizes he has been dreaming and recognizes his cousin Cécile, who he is to marry, as the ‘Gouailleuse’ of his dream. The dream sequence thus functions as a kind of parody *en abyme*,<sup>114</sup> which draws our attention to the text’s parodic status. Just as hypotexts and their characters come in ‘carnival pairs’ or ‘parodying doubles’ (Bakhtin 1984a: 127)<sup>115</sup> (i.e. *Les Mystères de Paris/Les Mystères de Passy*, Rodolphe/Pandolphe), so Pandolphe’s real life, in turn, has its dreamworld counterpart.

Another key aspect of ‘carnavalesque’ parody is its challenge to linguistic authority. There is a strong sense, in these parodies, of the celebration of language and linguistic diversity, a celebration which is ‘productive rather than regulative’ (Dentith 2000: 92). Word play is frequent,<sup>116</sup> in both the Cham text (‘*Les chiens de garde, quoique chiens, étaient loin d’être bêtes, car ils en voulaient tous à la culotte de Tortillard qu’ils reconnaissaient pour une culotte de malfaiteur*’ (CHAM: 114, my emphasis)) and *Les Mystères de Passy*:

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<sup>113</sup> See also VI.2 above.

<sup>114</sup> See Dällenbach 1977.

<sup>115</sup> See also Sangsue 2007: 68.

<sup>116</sup> According to Dentith, ‘never-ending puns introduced at any and every opportunity’ were ‘one of the most prominent and insistent features of nineteenth-century burlesque’ (2000: 149).

LE SOURINEUR.

Gargaillon, dit le Sourineur ; je suis sal...

PANDOLPHE.

Je n'osais pas vous le dire...

LE SOURINEUR.

Timbanque.

PANDOLPHE.

L'un n'empêche pas l'autre.

(PASSY: 5)

Significantly, the final words of ACTE V, SCÈNE IX, which marks the end of Pandolphe's dream, are a *jeu de mots*. Having set fire to a cottage in order to retrieve his stolen money, Pandolphe is distraught to realize that his beloved Gouailleuse was inside, and stands against a 'poteau indicateur' to be killed by a firing squad of poachers:

PANDOLPHE.

Sourineur, je te demande un dernier service ; tu commanderas le feu !

LE SOURINEUR.

Avec plaisir !

[...]

PANDOLPHE, se retournant.

Un instant, vous pourriez me crever un œil.

LE SOURINEUR, indiquant le bas des reins de Rodolphe [*sic*].

*Mes amis, visez au poteau, feu !*

(Le rideau tombe, et l'on entend le bruit des fusils qui partent.)

(PASSY: 39, my emphasis)

The joke derives from the fact that the exclamation sounds the same as 'pot-au-feu'.

The word is both a noun (meaning a stew) and an adjective, meaning 'home-loving'.

As such, it provides a fitting note with which to mark Pandolphe's departure from his carnivalesque dream and return to a decidedly conservative reality.

Word play is subversive as well as celebratory. As Dentith puts it, 'carnavalesque' writing 'draws upon a variety of accents and vocabularies, subjects them all to complex cross-exchanges, and makes the 'high' languages of courtesy, love and pastoral (among others) the topic for a bracing laughter' (2000: 129). Confusions frequently result from, and are exacerbated by, the social differences between citydwellers. As Dentith shows, parody is a particularly vibrant mode in '[s]trongly stratified societies [...] where separate classes live in relative social isolation, are very likely to produce mutual parodic characterisations of the social layers, whose manners of speech and writing are very strongly marked by class' (2000: 30-1).<sup>117</sup>

Pandolphe in particular struggles with socio-linguistic interaction, and is unable to distinguish between literal and figurative language, as the following example shows:

LA COLLE.

Il y a un particulier, nouvellement arrivé à Passy, chez lequel nous pouvons nous introduire quand la brune sera venue... [...] *Pour le faire danser !*  
[...]

LA COLLE.

Peut-on compter sur le courage de tout le monde, ici ?

TOUS, se levant, excepté Pandolphe, le Sourineur et la Gouailleuse.  
Oui !

LA COLLE.

Il n'y a pas de traître parmi nous ?

TOUS.

Il serait massacré !

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<sup>117</sup> On the pervasiveness of parody in the 'highly socially zoned' English society of the 1880s-1950s, see Dentith (2000: 31).

PANDOLPHE.

*Ah ça ! je ne comprends pas ces sermens pour une partie de bal ?...*

[...]

*Non... la danse n'est pas ce que j'aime.*

(PASSY: 14-5, my emphasis)<sup>118</sup>

He even goes so far as to use literal and metaphorical language in consecutive sentences, creating an ironic juxtaposition of which he seems entirely unaware, but which cannot escape the audience's notice: 'Je veux vous cacher aux loups qui vous guettent, candide brebis !.. Allez garder mes moutons ; vous trouverez là-bas une belle femme, mademoiselle Georges, qui vous mettra au fait...' (PASSY: 21). This linguistic ineptitude places Pandolphe in stark contrast to Rodolphe, whose implausible mastery of slang allows him to slip seamlessly into the Parisian underworld and on a par, instead, with the spectator, whose appreciation of *Passy* hinges on his recognition of parodic uses of language.<sup>119</sup>

In Cham's parody, the language of aristocratic characters is mocked, as in the following example, when the marquis d'Harville wonders if his cold wife might, after all, love him, in an exclamation peppered with imperfect subjunctives: '– O

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<sup>118</sup> See also the misunderstanding between la Gouailleuse and Gourand: she suggests tying him up, literally, so as to fend off his lecherous advances, but he understands 'attachment' in the figurative sense:

LA GOUAILLEUSE.

Je veux vous attacher.

GOURAND.

Ah ! tu m'as attaché pour la vie !

LA GOUAILLEUSE.

C'est n'est pas comme ça !... [...]

(PASSY: 31)

<sup>119</sup> Rose gives a very similar example from Austen's *Northanger Abbey*, where the confused reaction of Catherine to the ironic language of Tilney is used to mirror the possible reaction of readers of the parody (1979: 71)

Clémence ! s'écria-t-il avec transport, serait-il, Dieu ! possible que vous m'aimassiez, que je vous plusse et ne vous dégoûtasse pas !...' (CHAM: 135).

The main target of parodies pertaining to language from the other end of the social spectrum is the inconsistency of explanation. In some instances, explanation is conspicuous by its absence, as when Barbillon's slang-ridden address to a friend is announced:

Tâchez, lecteurs, de bien retenir ce qu'il lui dit, sans cela vous perdrez le fil de l'histoire :

– *Pitanchons l'aff, la bidasse fauche dans le point à mort. Nous aiderons à pessiller d'esbrouffe ses durailles et nous trimbalerons le refroidi dans ton passe-lance.* (CHAM: 142, emphasis in original)

On other occasions, narratorial interventions are comically intrusive, as in the following parody of the 'avertissement au lecteur':

Avant l'explication de ce dernier mot, je dois, cher lecteur, t'engager à prendre quelques pastilles de Malte : gare au mal de mer ! Un *arlequin* est un ramassis de viandes différentes, de poissons et de sauces diverses mêlés et provenant tous de la desserte des tables de domestiques... Pouah !!... (CHAM: 93, emphasis in original)

Cham's wry observation that Sue's text is now available in a number of different languages, but still not in standard French, is a nod to the particular urge towards linguistic explanation in the *mystères*:<sup>120</sup>

M. Eugène Sue, publie un livre qui fait la plus universelle sensation, – on le traduit dans toutes les langues, – en belge d'abord, ce qui n'est pas le plus beau ! – en anglais, en allemand, en hollandais (on finira quelque jour par le traduire en français). (CHAM: 88)

When linguistic explanations are provided by Cham, these are comically overzealous: 'L'inconnu' is given a tongue-in-cheek definition in parentheses ('(en

<sup>120</sup> On the lexicographical zeal which characterized the nineteenth century, see III.2 above.

argot cela veut dire l'homme qu'on ne connaît pas)' (CHAM: 92)) and two characters ponder the meaning of an English term whose French origin could not be more obvious:

- Ma chère amie, dit madame Dubreuil à madame Georges, je suis dans le plus grand embarras... J'ai absolument besoin de savoir ce que veut dire *comfortable* !
- Parbleu ! répond son amie, je vais vous le dire tout de suite.
- Bon ! Que vous êtes heureuse de savoir l'anglais !
- *Comfortable*, en anglais, veut dire, en français, *confortable*...
- Tiens, tiens, tiens ! Ah ben ! c'est bon !
- Voilà, ma chère, ça n'est pas plus difficile que ça. (CHAM: 117)<sup>121</sup>

But these parodies of Sue's linguistic explanations should be recognized for their metatextual value, and not dismissed as mere censure. According to the Russian Formalists, parody was about exposing or 'laying bare' the way in which the hypotext functioned.<sup>122</sup> Revealing 'tired' strategies to the reader in this way gave those strategies a new function.<sup>123</sup>

By exposing and elevating 'lowly' elements, 'carnavalesque' inversions could, in fact, demystify the hypotext entirely.<sup>124</sup> But the motifs of inversion and reflection are not just about a cursory reversal of roles and moral characteristics. The mirror as a recurrent symbol and structuring principle invites us to look again at the text itself. Similarly, the 'carnavalesque' treatment of language emerges as rather more than an exclusively destructive impulse. The hypotext is actually preserved and renewed by a foregrounding of its strategies. This self-reflexivity is a typically modern device and is motivated by the opportunism we have come to expect from

<sup>121</sup> On the redundancy or pseudo-scholarity of footnotes, see III.2 above.

<sup>122</sup> On the 'mise à nu' or 'dénudation' of the literary device, see Sangsue (2007: 56-60).

<sup>123</sup> 'Parody was seen as a dialectic substitution of formal elements whose functions have become mechanized or automatic. At this point, elements are "refunctionalized", to use their [the Russian Formalists'] term. A new form develops out of the old, without really destroying it; only the function is altered (Ejzenbaum 1965 and [1978]; Tomachevski 1965; Tynjanov 1978a). Parody therefore becomes a constructive principle in literary history (Tynjanov 1978b)' (Hutcheon 1985: 35-6). See also Hutcheon 1985: 20.

<sup>124</sup> On the 'demystifying spirit' of parody, see Dentith 2000: 48-9.

the *mystères*. Drawing the reader's attention away from the diegetic mysteries to ponder the mysteries of the text itself serves to revitalize the mystery premise and thereby ensure its continued commercial appeal.

### **The conservative**

As well as serving to upset the status quo, to 'attack the official word' and 'mock the pretensions of authoritative discourse' (Dentith 2000: 20), as we have seen above, parody can also be seen to perform a conservative, normative function, in that is it used to 'mock literary and social innovation, policing the boundaries of the sayable in the interests of those who wish to continue to say what has already been said' (Dentith 2000: 20).<sup>125</sup> This is a particularly interesting idea in the context of *Les Mystères de Paris*, as the text was contentious in terms of both its subject matter and its form, which were often evoked in similar terms.<sup>126</sup> As I will demonstrate, this conservatism manifests itself in different ways in the two different types of parody dealt with here.

The theatrical parody seeks to defuse the anxiety caused by Sue's political ideas, to allay fears about the supposedly pernicious influence of the novel and the practices of imitation and repetition. By subjecting the contentious elements of Sue's novel to a parodic dilution, the theatrical parody is able to cream off the inoffensive, lucrative essence of the work for its own exploitation. Cham's parody is equally opportunistic, although in a different way. As a piece of serialized prose, just like the hypotext, it more often than not preserves the very features it purports to criticize.

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<sup>125</sup> On the conservative impulse of parody, see also Hutcheon 1985 and Rose 1979.

<sup>126</sup> Dentith's discussion of Kitchin (1931), for example, refers to the defence of 'the common-sense values of *'centrally minded' people* against the *dangerous extremes*' (2000: 26, my emphases), thus using images of spatial marginalization as a metaphor for divergence from cultural norms.



Sue's progressive political ideas are addressed at the end of *Passy*, when Pandolphe's dream has convinced him that he should respect the wishes of his uncle (Dumontel) and marry his cousin, Cécile. This change of heart gives Dumontel the opportunity to bring the play to a close with a suitably conservative warning to his nephew and, by implication, the audience; generous and charitable impulses should be tempered, as not all poor people are deserving cases:

DUMONTEL.

Écoute-moi, mon ami, si tu trouves sur ton chemin de pauvres pères de famille laborieux, d'honnêtes ouvriers dans la gêne, ouvre-leur ton cœur et ta bourse, tout le monde t'approuvera ; mais ne prodigue pas ta pitié pour les paresseux ou les vagabonds, et souviens-toi que ceux qui perdent ainsi leur vie ne méritent l'intérêt de personne.

(PASSY: 41)

Such an ending was typical of the melodramatic mode, 'which characteristically dramatised the triumph of a threatened moral order' (Dentith 2000: 145).

*Passy* also performs a conservative function in tackling what was seen to be the pernicious influence of the novel. Pandolphe seeks to atone for the crime committed against his godfather<sup>127</sup> by modelling himself on Rodolphe: 'Divin Rodolphe, mon maître et mon modèle !... je t'imiterai partout, je serai ton petit singe !... Oui, admirable roman des *Mystères de Paris*, tu seras mon guide-âme !'<sup>128</sup> (PASSY: 3). Thrilled by the twists and turns of Sue's novel, he finds real life dull in comparison, and so rejects his uncle's offer of his cousin's hand in marriage: 'j'aurais horreur d'une union qui se ferait tout bêtement, sans difficultés, sans

<sup>127</sup> Here we have yet another 'double', as Rodolphe's crime was, of course, against his father (who opposed to his marriage to Sarah Mac-Gregor) (MP: 1115-6).

<sup>128</sup> This is a reference to Balzac's 1842 *Guide-Âne à l'usage des animaux qui veulent parvenir aux honneurs*, which parodied the taxonomical debate between biologists Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire and Georges Cuvier, and, as such, an acknowledgement of the parodic status of *Passy*. See Narayana 2012.

obstacles, et par conséquent sans amour. [...] si ma conduite vous paraît bouffonne, vous en trouverez l'explication dans les *Mystères de Paris*' (PASSY: 4).

Dentith describes this as a characteristic use of parody, especially in the novel, exemplified by Cervantes's *Don Quixote* (1605-16):

where falsifying or repudiated forms [...] are seen as infecting the mentality of the characters. The point of many novels will be to bring such characters to a saner or healthier view of the world; their comedy will spring from the distance between the characters' misrecognition of the world in the light of some false generic ideas, and the everyday actuality which in fact makes it up. (2000: 57-8)<sup>129</sup>

While *Don Quixote* 'attack[s] [...] the chivalric romance as a guide to life' (Dentith 2000: 56), Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* targets the gothic novel in much the same way.<sup>130</sup> Flaubert's *Emma Bovary* is perhaps the most famous nineteenth-century victim of such a delusive mentality. *Les Mystères de Passy* provides a particularly fascinating example of this type of parody. Popular fiction, and its rewriting and recycling in a variety of different forms, is the target here, and yet the would-be parody is yet another example of this recycling. The play opens with Muffe complaining about the multitude of books, engravings and serializations of Sue's novel, the irony being that *Les Mystères de Passy* is itself yet another addition to that list:<sup>131</sup>

*Les Mystères de Paris* !... première édition !... (Il prend une gravure.)  
Gravures des *Mystères de Paris* !... (Regardant une liasse de journaux.)  
Feuilletons des *Mystères de Paris* !... Partout la même chose !... dans le cabinet et sur le lit !... Je crois que M. Pandolphe, mon maître, a mis des

<sup>129</sup> On *Don Quixote*, see also Bakhtin 1984a: 128, Dentith 2000: 55-9 and Sangsue 2007: 78 and 83. On the importance of *Don Quixote* in popular fiction, see Vareille 1994: 146.

<sup>130</sup> '[T]he heroine, Catherine Morland, misrecognises the world because her head has been filled with the falsifying and romanticising ideas of Gothic novels' (Dentith 2000: 64).

<sup>131</sup> As Rose suggests, metafictional parody is not devoid of opportunism: 'in casting doubt on the veracity of the fictional world, or on the veracity of the concept of imitation, parody also extends the process of literary production, to make a new literary work from its criticism of the old, and from its questioning of the truth value of the fiction itself' (1979: 83).

mystères jusque dans ses bottes !... Il a la tête tournée, les idées bouleversées par ce roman !... Et pour comble de tyrannie, il m'a ordonné de lire aussi les *Mystères de Paris* !... En v'là un abus de pouvoir !

(PASSY: 1)

The play ends with Pandolphe cured, thanks to his carnivalesque dream, of his delusional dependence on Sue's novel:

DUMONTEL.

[...] Je viens savoir quand vous voudrez que votre famille vous fasse conduire à Charenton ?...<sup>132</sup>

PANDOLPHE.

J'en suis revenu, mon cher oncle !... Je voulais jouer au Rodolphe, courir les mansardes comme lui !... convertir des gueusards !... faire écouter de la morale en payant très cher !... enfin, sauver des vertus naufragées... mais par bonheur, cette nuit, j'ai vu en rêve tout ce que je voulais faire en réalité... et je me trouve parfaitement guéri de ma pitoyable folie !...

(PASSY: 40)

Dumontel's moralizing conclusion ends with a song, which reiterates to Pandolphe the impossibility of measuring up to the character he was trying to imitate:

AIR : Du Charlatanisme.

A ce grand seigneur généreux,  
Tu ne pourrais être semblable ;  
C'est, en vous comparant tous deux,  
L'aigle et le corbeau de la fable.  
Auprès du grand acteur nouveau,  
Tu ne deviendrais qu'un comparse ;  
Imiter l'aigle c'est trop beau,  
Et tu serais, non le corbeau,  
Mais bien le dindon de la farce !

(PASSY: 40)

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<sup>132</sup> Charenton was a well-known lunatic asylum.

In fact, Dumontel's point may have implications beyond the 'delusive mentality' of the main character. His belief that Pandolphe's imitation of Rodolphe would inevitably descend into farce must be seen to reflect the pervasive mistrust of cultural practices of reproduction and repetition in general at this time. As Vareille explains, 'le roman feuilleton par excellence n'est pas celui qui « transgresse les règles du genre », mais celui qui s'y plie ; donc, qui est une copie conforme, qui respecte scrupuleusement les règles qu'il s'est lui-même données' (1989: 88).<sup>133</sup>

When *Les Mystères de Paris* was published, this was, however, a new aesthetic, unable to rival 'l'idéologie de l'individualité du génie, de l'originalité à tout prix' (Vareille 1989: 90).<sup>134</sup> The use of metafictional parody to highlight problems of representation, and especially to criticize the mimetic pretensions of art,<sup>135</sup> is extended here, in order to highlight the limitations of hypertextuality. Dumontel's song, therefore, is as much about the text itself, as about his errant nephew. The song is also a shameless exercise in self-publicity on the part of Rochefort and Artois, who also seem to be implying that, if Pandolphe has proved himself disastrously inept at imitating Rodolphe, they have been rather more successful in emulating Sue.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> See also Todorov 1971.

<sup>134</sup> On the different perceptions of rewriting held by these two aesthetics, see Sangsue: 'Dans une idéologie de l'histoire cumulative, évolutive, la réécriture sera perçue comme la possibilité d'un renouvellement, tandis que dans une idéologie entropique de l'histoire (mythologie de l'âge d'or, valorisation des origines, etc.), elle aura tendance à être considérée comme une dégradation – on songera ici à la célèbre citation de Marx dans *Le 18 brumaire de Louis Napoléon* : « Hegel fait quelque part cette remarque que tous les grands événements se répètent pour ainsi dire deux fois. Il a oublié d'ajouter : la première fois comme tragédie, la seconde fois comme farce ».

C'est donc la reproductibilité des modèles et la valeur qu'on attache à leur « reprise » qui sont ici en jeu. Le choix de telle ou telle forme de réécriture tient au statut qu'une époque ou un individu confèrent à leurs modèles et à l'idée qu'ils se font de leur possibilité de les reconduire' (1994: 93-4). (A version of the same passage can be found in Sangsue 2007: 131.)

<sup>135</sup> See Rose 1979: 63, 67, 73, 83, 90 and 102.

<sup>136</sup> See Rose's acknowledgement of a similar tactic in *Don Quixote*, in which: 'Cervantes [...] represents himself [...] as both a more self-conscious reader of the Romance than his hero, and as an author capable of rewriting it and other works to greater effect' (1979: 67).

If the theatrical parody panders to socio-political and cultural conservatism by toning down contentious elements of the hypotext, the conservatism of Cham's parody operates in a slightly different direction. On a number of occasions, Cham's conservatism with regard to the hypotext takes the form of a refusal of parody altogether. He is particularly complimentary about the *Misère*, *Confession* and *Crime* chapters of Sue's novel, which detail, respectively, the destitution of the Morel family (including 'une scène admirable de douleur maternelle' (CHAM: 125)) (MP: 420-7), Louise Morel's rape by Jacques Ferrand (499-508), and her subsequent pregnancy (508-14). Cham is emphatic about the fact that he has refrained from parodying these parts of the novel:

Nous pouvons parodier des scènes fort belles et paraître insensibles à des situations très intéressantes, nous rions alors soit des invraisemblances, soit des exagérations qu'il faut oublier ou ne pas voir pour s'attendrir ; mais ce dernier chapitre est tellement irréprochable, que c'eût été une mauvaise action d'en faire la parodie [...] Nous le répétons, ces pages sont irréprochables et la critique doit les respecter. Le rire, la moquerie seraient une profanation dont nous ne voulons pas nous rendre coupable.  
(CHAM: 122-3)

In other instances Cham tells us that he need only copy directly from Sue's text, as it already parodic (Appendix VIII.6.12).<sup>137</sup> This recognition that the hypotext itself is parodic is significant. By identifying and retaining parodic sections of Sue's text, Cham is certainly seeking to undermine it. But the text's refusal to comply with the parodic transformation must also be seen as an indication of the pervasiveness of parody. To return to the point made by Dentith: "Parody" should be thought of, not

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<sup>137</sup> Popular fiction's ambiguous relationship with parody, in some instances precluding it, while in others pre-empting it, is summed up particularly well by Vareille: 'Certains romans populaires, ou certains de leurs passages, c'est l'évidence même, réclament une lecture on ne peut plus sérieuse et au premier degré : ceux d'E. Sue souvent, les romans « de la victime » de la fin du siècle, les romans sentimentaux, les romans engagés à quelque bord qu'ils appartiennent. Cependant, à côté de ces romans prêcheurs et même pontifiants, qui font écho à l'esprit de sérieux réaliste, naturaliste ou positiviste, combien d'autres sont-ils emportés par le simple plaisir du jeu ? Or ce caractère ludique provient toujours, entre autres choses, de la reprise parodique des structures et des poncifs du genre' (1989: 96).

as a single and tightly definable genre or practice, but as a range of cultural practices which are all more or less parodic' (2000: 19). If parodic practices are showcased particularly well in parodies of *Les Mystères de Paris*, this is because parody and popular fiction share the same mélange of the familiar and the unfamiliar, of repetition and difference. Sangsue's description of parody as 'un composé de familier et d'étrange' (2007: 19) could be applied to communication in general,<sup>138</sup> but especially to popular fiction, which is characterized by a heavy reliance on repetition, described by Vareille as 'un mixte d'identité et de différence, de permanence et de variation' (1989: 87).<sup>139</sup>

In other instances, Cham's parody magnifies the very features of the text it claims to criticize, enlisting the help of Sue's characters not only to ridicule serial conventions, but also to reproduce them. As the Bouqueval scene is prepared, we are told that: 'Bêtes et gens étaient aussi impatients que nous d'arriver au but' (CHAM: 110). The prospect of having to plough through a stack of serials is more horrific to the Maître d'école than any punishment he might receive at the hands of Rodolphe and his estranged wife:

– Rodolphe ! Madame Georges !... Mon bourreau ! Mon épouse ! murmura le brigand, foudroyé par cette révélation. Quoi ! Je la retrouverais ! Ah ! le ciel serait-il assez rageur pour me rendre ma femme ! Plutôt mille fois reperdre

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<sup>138</sup> 'At some level [...] parody involves the imitation and transformation of another's words. That might also pass as an account of language use more generally, for language is not one's own, but always comes to each speaker from another, to be imitated and transformed as that speaker in turn sends it onwards' (Dentith 2000: 3). Sangsue agrees that: 'nous utilisons constamment la parodie sans nous en rendre compte. Dès que nous reprenons une phrase entendue, simplement en lui donnant un autre ton, ou en changeant quelques-uns de ses mots pour en transformer le sens, nous faisons de la parodie' (2007: 19).

<sup>139</sup> Sustained use of repetition means that popular fiction frequently descends into self-parody: 'le redit et le ressassé favorisent l'auto-parodie ; un texte qui copie et recopie, qui se copie et recopie, introduit en lui le reflet, soit le mécanique, et, par pulsion défensive, une distance auto-parodique' (Vareille 1989: 92). Vareille goes on to identify a tendency toward self-parody in several authors of popular fiction, referring to: '[l']ironie et [l']auto-ironie dont la présence frappe chez tant de feuilletonistes : chez un Féval sans doute, mais aussi chez un Xavier de Montépin ou un Ponson du Terrail dont la virtuosité est telle que l'on se demande constamment s'ils rédigent un roman ou, d'emblée, une parodie de roman' (1989: 93). See also Gauthier 2011: 21 and 423.

les yeux ! Plutôt monter la garde ! Plutôt lire quatre volumes en feuilleteons !... (CHAM: 115)

And even when the characters are enthused by the narrative, the narrator insists on the reader's apathy: 'Pendant que la Goualeuse s'occupait de ses petites bêtes, madame Georges et l'abbé Laporte, curé de Bouqueval, assis au coin du feu, parlaient de Fleur-de-Marie, *sujet d'entretien toujours intéressant... pour eux*' (CHAM: 111, my emphasis).

Criminal characters are also revealed to be the innocent victims of market forces. La Chouette, for example, becomes a benevolent character, whose cruelty towards Fleur-de-Marie is performed at the behest of readers of the *Journal des Débats*:

A cette époque une personne charitable et borgne l'avait lancée d'abord dans le commerce des asticots, ensuite dans celui des sucres d'orge ; puis, *le besoin d'émouvoir les lecteurs blasés des Débats s'étant fait sentir*, la borgnesse avait fini par lui arracher les cheveux des tempes, lui casser les dents avec des tenailles et les extirper avec les ongles.  
(CHAM: 93, my emphasis)

But the characters are also complicit in creating the features of the text Cham is supposedly criticizing. They repeatedly encourage each other to keep talking, for example, ('Jacassons un peu, taillons des bavettes au public : cela allongera la sauce et ça tirera à la page' (CHAM: 99)) and struggle against the boredom induced by the various stories told *en abyme*, ever mindful of the commercial gain to be had from lengthening the narrative:

– Je crois, mon cher Mufle, que vous êtes fatigué ?  
– Non, non, c'est votre histoire du marquis [d'Harville] qui m'en... qui m'endort un peu ; mais c'est égal, narrez toujours... ça pousse au volume... (CHAM: 101)

Similarly, when Rodolphe discovers the letter implicating Ferrand in a crime against Madame la baronne de Fermont, rather than expressing concern for Ferrand's victim, he delights in the commercial potential of his find: 'Rodolphe empocha la lettre en se disant : Ma foi ! Je donnerai ça à mon ami Sue, qui en fera soixante-quinze feuillets pour les *Débats*' (CHAM: 129). Cham is satirizing popular fiction's relentless commercial opportunism by making Sue's characters complicit in it. The irony is that the parody itself is equally opportunistic, in that Cham's mockery of the various methods of padding out the hypotext lengthens the parody itself.

In conclusion, these parodies of *Les Mystères de Paris*, even when they appear to be subversive, often have a strong conservative impulse, which bears testament to the pervasive cultural, social and political conservatism of the nineteenth-century city into which Sue's text, and the parodies of it, were received. The conservatism of both parodies analysed here is motivated by opportunism. While the theatrical parody ridicules and thereby tones down controversial elements of the hypotext so as to preserve and capitalize on its success, the prose parody, although appearing to mock and criticize Sue's strategies, cannot disguise its reliance on the same forms. This conservatism does not, however, preclude the novelty which the Russian Formalists saw as integral to parody. Mocking the various devices used by Sue inevitably involves exposing those devices to the scrutiny of the reader. The gestures of unveiling, revealing and exhibiting, hitherto associated with mystery at the diegetic level, thus take on a new resonance, in relation to the text itself.



**Figure 7**



Silhouette illustrations of Rigolette, Cecily, and Rodolphe watching Rigolette: Cham. [1843]. 'Paris dévoilé ou les mystères sus', in *Parodies littéraires*, ed. by Bertrand Tillier (Paris/Jaïgues: Phileas Fogg/La Chasse au Snark, 2003) (CHAM), pp. 100, 101 and 127



## VII. CONCLUSION

In this study, I have used the palimpsest as an interpretative lens through which to consider various rewritings of Eugène Sue's *Mystères de Paris*. I have considered the paratext as a kind of palimpsest, which, rather than offering the explanation and resolution we might expect of it, instead conspires to rewrite and reaffirm the mystery of the hypotext. I have analysed the reinscription of identity, demonstrating how the hunting cliché is reappropriated, in order to fictionalize the emergence of the detective figure, how secret societies are used to circumscribe a disconcertingly amorphous mass of popular readers, and how rewritings of sexual identity provide a fertile metaphor for intertextual dynamics. I have also examined geographical and temporal transpositions, as well as serialization, theatre adaptation and parody.

If my use of Genette's methodological framework has been selective, and my departures from his rigid typology at times radical, this must be attributed to the fact that the palimpsest as a critical notion is, inevitably, subject to the same reinscription it represents. As Dillon explains, 'writing about the palimpsest becomes an act of palimpsesting: [...]. Writing about the palimpsest is a process of writing *on* the palimpsest – of partaking in its history and of adding another layer to the involution of texts that characterizes that history' (2007: 9, emphasis in original).<sup>1</sup> Indeed, this continual rewriting and reinvention of the palimpsest is crucial if the notion is to retain its critical vitality. In Dillon's words, '[i]n order for concepts like the palimpsest [...] to remain critically effective they must stay open to the possibility of further reinscription' (2007: 125).

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<sup>1</sup> See also Dillon 2007: 125.

To return to the research questions articulated in my introductory chapter, the continual rewriting of *Les Mystères de Paris* results, most notably, in an insistent self-consciousness in the texts, which manifests itself in a variety of different ways. Paratexts impinge on texts and become, in an irreverent parody of their own conventions, complicit in the mystification of the reader. Extra-diegetic phenomena, such as the emergence of the detective character, the rise of an eclectic, indeterminate group of popular readers, and the conflation of reading and writing activities encouraged by the serial form, are reproduced *en abyme* within the novels. Similarly, geographical and temporal transpositions transcend Genette's 'diegetic' label and repeatedly prove themselves to have a meta-diegetic resonance. American-set *mystères* are much more a reflection of the Americanization of culture than accurate representations of the American metropolis, while temporal transpositions cultivate confusion between *Histoire* and *histoire*, so as to foreground the strategies at work in the text. The reader's attention is deliberately diverted from the mysteries of the cities to the machinations of the text itself.

Such self-consciousness was, of course, a hallmark of literary modernity. As Sangsue puts it: 'après avoir voulu refléter le moi, puis la réalité, la littérature tend à s'auto-réfléchir, dans une conscience de plus en plus aiguë du déjà vu et du déjà lu' (2007: 40). But the close affinity between city and text (which was, as I hope to have shown here, a reality, as much as an analogy) meant that this self-reflexivity was perhaps nowhere more inevitable, pronounced and pre-programmed than in the *mystères urbains*. If Sue's text was preoccupied with the city, then that city, in turn, was just as preoccupied with the text, dictating the terms and providing the forum for its production, consumption, reception and rewriting, a fact to which

Delphine de Girardin's comment on the ubiquity of *Les Mystères de Paris*, used as the epigraph to this study, bears testament.

To revisit another of my research questions, do the *mystères* invite us to reconsider binary oppositions of 'literary' versus 'popular' (or 'paraliterary') texts? Certainly, the self-reflexivity I have observed is indicative of a body of texts increasingly defined on its own terms, rather than in relation to a superior form. As Bourdieu tells us:

l'accès du roman à la réflexivité [...], on le sait, est une des manifestations majeures de l'autonomie d'un champ : l'allusion à l'histoire interne du genre, sorte de clin d'œil à un lecteur capable de s'appropriier cette histoire des œuvres (et pas seulement l'histoire racontée par l'œuvre).  
(1998 [1992]: 171-2)

The palimpsest in particular was, increasingly, a kind of meeting point, a neutral ground between the 'literary' and the 'popular'. As Sangsue explains, in the post-Romantic period, hypertextual practices such as rewriting were increasingly the norm:

avec la fin du romantisme, des valeurs comme l'inspiration et le génie disparaissent au profit de conceptions plus « artisanales » de la littérature, dans lesquelles la réécriture, l'imitation des modèles reconnus sont considérées à nouveau comme des étapes nécessaires de la création (Proust commence sa carrière par des pastiches, Mallarmé par des imitations de Baudelaire, etc.). (Sangsue 2007: 40)

The *mystères* also invite us to view literature itself as a palimpsest, a multi-layered but nonetheless single entity, within which the 'literary' and the 'popular', rather than being categorically distinct, are parts of the same whole.<sup>2</sup> The self-consciousness inherent to the *mystères* reinforces this point. I have shown, for

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<sup>2</sup> This compelling point was one discussed at the recent '(Re-)Writing Wrongs: French Crime Fiction and the Palimpsest' conference (Durham University, 14 September 2012).

example, how the dialectic of showing and concealing foregrounded in the *mystères* is integral to communication in general. Similarly, the polyphony of the *feuilleton*, rather than being an aberrant feature, could be said to magnify and parody the polyphony of the modern novel.

This brings me back full-circle to the emphasis placed, in my introductory chapter, on refusing binary oppositions and transcending boundaries, both within and across disciplines. I would like to finish by suggesting a number of avenues for future research on the *mystères urbains*, which, I envisage, would have a very similar, holistic emphasis. As Queffélec explains, there are clear parallels to be drawn between the nineteenth-century serial novel and modern forms of popular culture: ‘il n’y a pas rupture, mais continuité entre [le roman-feuilleton et l’histoire moderne de la culture de masse]’, given that ‘[m]algré le changement du médium, messages, techniques, fonctions restent [...] souvent les mêmes’ (1989: 120 and 121).<sup>3</sup> The numerous film and television adaptations of *Les Mystères de Paris*<sup>4</sup> and, indeed, other *mystères*, could indeed form the basis of an interesting study.

To Queffélec’s suggestions, I would add the even more recent phenomenon of ‘fan fiction’, or the online publication of readers’ additions or amendments to works they have enjoyed. The practice is clearly analogous to the reader participation discussed in IV.3 and VI.1 above. From a pedagogical perspective, studying *Les Mystères de Paris* alongside such a topical sociological phenomenon, as well as being extremely engaging, would also serve to confirm the text’s continued pertinence.

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<sup>3</sup> On ‘The Future of the Serial Form’, see Hayward (1997: 135-96).

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, film versions by Jacques de Baroncelli (1943), starring Marcel Herrand, Yolande Laffon and Alexandre Rignault, and André Hunebelle (1962), with Jean Marais, Dany Robin, Jill Haworth and Raymond Pellegrin, as well as the television serial directed by André Michel and featuring Sigmar Solbach, Noëlle Leiris and Christiane Deschaumes.

Whatever form future research on the *mystères urbains* may take, there can be no denying, then, that these texts still hold certain ‘mysteries’ for the modern reader. Most importantly, the *mystères* are not anachronisms to be unearthed (and discarded), in line with the structuralist view of the palimpsest. Instead the *mystères urbains*, just like the palimpsest as conceived of by the poststructuralists, must be seen as ‘inextricably tangled and intertwined’ (Dillon 2007: 83) with modern forms of popular culture and, as such, of enduring relevance.





## VIII. APPENDICES

### VIII.1 – PROGRAMME

#### **Adaptation scénique : Un défi**

*Quelle gageure d'adapter à la scène et en plein air le roman-feuilleton, long et foisonnant d'Eugène Sue.*

*Michel Deque a relevé le défi de faire vivre devant vous ses personnages inquiétants, ses dialogues originaux et son suspense prenant. Tous les ingrédients du mélodrame pour tenir en haleine les spectateurs effrayés et ravis de suivre des aventures presque de cape et d'épée, dans les rues glauques du Paris de 1840. Tout cela tranquillement installés sous le ciel de Paris, en plein air, au milieu du Bois de Boulogne, dans l'un des plus beaux théâtres en plein air d'Europe.*

#### **Michel Deque : adaptateur**

*Voilà un homme éclectique au parcours aussi long que riche, fait d'expériences variées et de passions assumées. En résumé, au hasard des rencontres de la vie, ce licencié es Lettres et combattant des Forces Françaises Libres, a été acteur professionnel pendant plus de 20 ans sur les scènes parisiennes, des Variétés au Châtelet, journaliste, il a été aussi directeur du Théâtre de Belfort pendant 3 ans. Amoureux du théâtre et des romans populaires, il allie ses deux passions en adaptant, **Le Bossu**, **Goupil Main Rouge** et bien sûr les **Mystères de Paris**.*

## Note d'intention du metteur en scène : Arnaud Bruyère

Voilà plusieurs années déjà que me titillait l'envie de faire une mise en scène d'un mélo, genre de théâtre fort peu joué mais que je trouve terriblement efficace. Et voilà que me tombe entre les mains la superbe adaptation de **Michel Deque** à laquelle j'ai tout de suite adhéré ! Un sens très incisif de l'écriture, de l'action, des scènes courtes et efficaces, des retournements de situations rocambolesques, des « méchants » vraiment odieux, des « gentils » pas totalement innocents, des retrouvailles émouvantes et cette question digne des meilleurs feuilletons télévisés :

« Mais que va-t-il se passer maintenant ? Comme en 1842, quand est sorti le long roman à épisodes que publiait le « Journal des Débats ». Ce fut réellement du délire. On faisait la queue au bureau du journal, chaque jour, pour connaître la suite des aventures de l'infortunée héroïne du roman. Chaque fin d'épisode se terminant invariablement au moment le plus pathétique.

Les lecteurs pressaient **Eugène Sue** de mettre un terme au calvaire de la pauvre enfant, de dévoiler les imposteurs et de châtier les coupables. Ce feuilleton tenait en haleine toutes les couches de la société, la cour de **Louis-Philippe**, même. Pour respecter le roman, il me fallait une troupe de

bons comédiens rompus à ce genre d'exercice, des duels réglés par un maître d'armes, quelques chansons, Un respect vestimentaire pour l'œuvre initiale et le Jardin Shakespeare, endroit idéal avec une multitude de possibilités scéniques, une diversité des lieux, une écoute parfaite du texte, un cadre enchanteur aux portes de Paris. **Les Mystères de Paris** restent la première affirmation d'un genre qui trouvera 20 ans plus tard sa plus haute expression littéraire avec **les Misérables** de **Victor Hugo**. Toute la troupe de comédiens espère que vous prendrez autant de plaisir à voir ce spectacle que nous en avons eu à le monter pour vous.

## Le Metteur en scène ARNAUD BRUYÈRE



*Après deux ans au Conservatoire Royal de Belgique, descend à Paris pour suivre les cours de René Simon, débute avec **Fernand Ledoux**, dans le rôle de **Damis** du « Tartuffe »...enchaine ensuite avec le rôle de **CLéante** dans « l'Avare » avec **Georges Chamarat** et **Lise Delamarre**; viennent ensuite des rôles aussi divers que **Caliste** (la Célestine), **Valvert** (Cyrano de Bergerac), le **Prince Jean** (Robin des Bois), **Passipoil** (Le Bossu), **Aramis** (Les Trois Mousquetaires) le **Roi** (Hamlet) ou encore **la Nourrice** (Roméo et Juliette) On peut le voir à Paris dans « le Joueur d'Echec » d'après **Stefan Zweig**. Il joue également au cinéma auprès de **Belmondo**, **Blier**, **Marielle**, **Maccione**... Joue actuellement : **Maître à Danser** dans « Le bourgeois Gentilhomme » (Molière) avec la Compagnie les Lustres Théâtre.*

## VIII.2 – CORPUS TEXT QUOTATIONS, CHAPTER II

### VIII.2.1

[...] *nous conduirons le lecteur à Bicêtre*. [...] En arrivant à Bicêtre, on entre d'abord dans une vaste cour plantée de grands arbres, coupée de pelouses vertes ornées en été de plates-bandes de fleurs. (MP: 1190)

On se souvient que Fleur-de-Marie, sauvée par la Louve, avait été transportée, non loin de l'île du Ravageur, dans la maison de campagne du docteur Griffon, l'un des médecins de *l'hospice civile où nous conduirons le lecteur*. [...] Rien de plus attristant que l'aspect nocturne de *la vaste salle d'hôpital où nous introduirons le lecteur*. (MP: 1133 and 1138)

Pendant l'entretien de Germain et de la grisette, d'autres scènes s'étaient passées dans *une des cours de la prison, où nous conduirons le lecteur*. (MP: 1009)

### VIII.3 – CORPUS TEXT QUOTATIONS, CHAPTER III

#### VIII.3.1

Ce n'est pas une raison simplement commerciale qui nous a fait prendre ce titre lourd à porter : *Nouveaux Mystères de Paris*. Nous n'avons point oublié quelle tâche s'était imposée l'illustre romancier qui est allé mourir dans l'exil, après avoir laissé dans nos librairies cette œuvre imposante qui dit son âme au peuple qu'il aimait. [...]

Le journal populaire qui a publié les *Nouveaux Mystères de Paris* ne pouvait, faute de timbre, entrer dans la plus petite discussion sociale – et de nos projets, il n'est resté que le cadre.

C'est une série d'aventures que nous offrons au lecteur ; la législation actuelle ne nous a pas permis de faire autre chose dans une feuille littéraire. (SCHOLL: 1-2)

#### VIII.3.2

[...] notre ami est trop jeune encore pour savoir rien cacher de ses sentiments, et j'ai surpris un secret qu'il aurait peut-être voulu ne confier à personne.

– Un secret ? dit Fernande.

– Il aime.

– Que dites-vous ?

– Un amour mystérieux.

– Il vous l'a dit ?

– Et cet amour...

Lopès remua la tête.

– Je ne sais pas si je dois vous le confier, dit-il en souriant et en baissant la voix.

– Pourquoi donc ?... demanda Fernande.

[...]

– Il a peur ? dit Fernande.

– Sans doute.

– Cette femme est donc indigne de son amour ?

– Elle en est bien digne, au contraire.

– Eh bien ?

– Et bien ! Franck a un doute.

– Lequel ? [...] (NUITS: 201-2)

#### VIII.3.3

– Eh ! Polyte, crois-tu qu'il *planchera* ?

– Lui ! un *zig* qui s'est *tiré les pieds* de Cayenne en *butant* trois *roussins* ! Pas de danger. Il montera à *l'abbaye de Cinq-Pierres* comme je monte au *poulailler* de l'Ambigu.

– Qu'est-ce qu'ils disent ? demanda l'homme aux larges épaules à son camarade de fenêtre.

– Tiens ! c'est vrai, tu sais le français, mais tu ne comprends pas l'argot, répondit l'autre en riant.

– L'argot, c'est la langue des voleurs, je crois. Est-ce que tu la comprends, toi, Marcel ?

– Parbleu ! tu sais bien que je suis Parisien. Sois tranquille, mon vieux Dominique, j'ai eu beau passer dix ans avec toi aux mines de Californie, j'entends encore à merveille tous les idiomes de ma ville natale, y compris le javanais. Tu veux savoir ce que disent ces affreux gamins ? L'un demande si le condamné faiblira devant l'échafaud. L'autre répond que le condamné est un brave qui s'est évadé du bagne en tuant trois gardes-chiourme et qu'il ira au supplice comme on va à la comédie. (NOUV: 4)

### VIII.3.4

C'est [...] sur cette tenture grenat, fond vigoureux et chaud de ton, que *se dessine* la figure de Cecily, que nous allons tâcher de *peindre*. (MP: 932)

Une courte jupe de mérinos orange [...] laisse voir à demi le genou charmant de la créole, chaussée de bas écarlates à coins bleus, *ainsi que cela se rencontre chez les vieux peintres flamands*, qui montrent si complaisamment les jarretières de leurs robustes héroïnes.

*Jamais artiste n'a rêvé* un galbe aussi pur que celui des jambes de Cecily. (MP: 932)

Et Cecily alla vers la cheminée, éteignit la lampe, prit une guitare suspendue au mur et attisa le feu, dont les flamboyantes lueurs éclairèrent alors cette vaste pièce.

De l'étroit guichet où il se tenait immobile, tel était le *tableau* qu'apercevait Jacques Ferrand. (MP: 947)

Pour compléter l'effet de ce *tableau*, que le lecteur se rappelle l'aspect mystérieux, presque fantastique, d'un appartement où la flamme de la cheminée lutte contre les grandes ombres noires qui tremblent au plafond et sur les murailles... (MP: 948)

– Oh ! viens... viens... viens...

*Peindre* le regard électrique dont elle accompagna ces paroles serait impossible... (MP: 949)

– Oh !... [...] Oh !... ma fortune... ma vie pour une minute de cette volupté dévorante... que tu *peins* en traits de flamme. (MP: 949)

un enivrement *impossible à peindre* (MP: 953)

## VIII.4 – CORPUS TEXT QUOTATIONS, CHAPTER IV

### VIII.4.1

– Mais alors, si c’est M. Le Planchais qui a sauté après le *caroubleur*, le valet de chambre doit être encore dans la maison.

– Eh ! que m’importe ? courons à la gare ! peut-être Dominique n’est-il que blessé.

– Silence ! on vient, dit tout bas M. Chambras en lui saisissant le bras d’une main et en lui montrant de l’autre le corridor faiblement éclairé par le reflet d’une lumière.

Celui qui la portait descendait lentement l’escalier.

– C’est mon libéré de Poissy qui vient voir comment l’affaire s’est terminée, murmura le sous-chef de la *sûreté*. Le temps de l’*emballer*, et je suis à vous.

(NOUV: 319, emphases in original)

### VIII.4.2

La voiture s’arrêta devant la porte d’une jolie villa ; elle descendit, ôta son masque pour parler au cocher en se plaçant de manière à ce que les deux jeunes gens pussent la voir.

Quel désappointement ! La dame avait une moustache. Cette ravissante créature était un homme ! Nos deux jeunes gens perdirent toute illusion et s’en allèrent de très mauvaise humeur, en regrettant le temps qu’ils avaient perdu.

La personne s’était jouée d’eux. Après qu’ils furent partis et qu’elle les eut perdu de vue, elle remit le masque, remonta dans la voiture et partit de nouveau. C’était vraiment une femme, mais elle avait mis exprès une fausse moustache pour le cas où son masque serait tombé. Elle avait fait arrêter la voiture devant cette villa dans le but de se débarrasser de la poursuite de ces deux jeunes gens, pour rentrer chez elle sans que personne pût savoir qui elle était et où elle demeurait.

(NICE I 1883-4: 24-5)

### VIII.4.3

Elle avait toujours eu un goût excessif pour les gravures de modes ; au couvent, elle ne rêvait déjà que velours, dentelles et crinolines. Plus d’une fois même, elle avait vu passer dans son sommeil ces héros guindés et parfumés que la Sylphide et le Bon Ton offrent mensuellement à l’admiration de leurs lectrices.

Octave était la réalisation la plus complète de son idéal. Aucune jeune fille fut donc plus heureuse que Sylvia en reconnaissant dans son fiancé le beau jeune homme du journal qu’elle recevait en cachette, et elle se prit à l’aimer avec un oubli et un enivrement que pouvaient seules lui inspirer et ses redingotes longues et ses manchettes *mousquetaire*. (NUITS: 131)

#### VIII.4.4

Elle me tenait la tête entre les genoux comme dans un étau. Enfin, moitié avec les tenailles, moitié avec ses doigts, elle m'a tiré cette dent : et puis elle m'a dit, pour m'effrayer, bien sûr : « Maintenant, je t'en arracherai une comme ça tous les jours, Pégriotte ; et, quand tu n'auras plus de dents, je te ficheraï à l'eau : tu seras mangée par les poissons [...]

– Ah ! la gueuse ! casser, arracher les dents à une pauvre petite enfant ! s'écria le Chourineur avec un redoublement de fureur.

– Eh bien, après ? Est-ce qu'il y paraît maintenant, voyons ? dit Fleur-de-Marie.

Et elle entrouvrit en souriant une de ses lèvres roses, en montrant deux rangées de petites dents blanches comme des perles. (MP: 53)

#### VIII.4.5

Tout le monde a entendu parler de ces filles de couleur pour ainsi dire mortelles aux Européens, de *ces vampires enchanteurs* qui, enivrant leur victime de séductions terribles, pompent jusqu'à sa dernière goutte d'or et de sang, et ne lui laissent, selon l'énergique expression du pays, que ses larmes à boire, que son cœur à ronger.

Telle est Cecily.

[...]

[Mais] [a]u lieu de se jeter violemment sur *sa proie*, et de ne songer, comme ses pareilles, qu'à anéantir au plus tôt une vie et une fortune de plus, Cecily, attachant sur ses victimes son regard magnétique, commençait par les attirer peu à peu dans le tourbillon embrasé qui semblait émaner d'elle ; puis, les voyant alors pantelantes, éperdues, souffrant les tortures d'un désir inassouvi, elle se plaisait, par un raffinement de coquetterie féroce, à prolonger leur délire ardent ; puis, revenant à son premier instinct, elle les *dévorait* dans ses embrassements homicides.

Cela était plus horrible encore.

*Le tigre affamé*, qui bondit et emporte *la proie* qu'il déchire en rugissant, inspire moins d'horreur que le serpent qui la fascine silencieusement, l'aspire peu à peu, l'enlace de ses replis inextricables, *l'y broie longuement*, *la sent palpiter sous ses lentes morsures* et semble se repaître autant de ses douleurs que de son sang. (MP: 933-4, my emphases)

#### VIII.4.6

[...] elle était, paraît-il, véritablement souffrante.

Un célèbre docteur, mandé auprès d'elle, avait constaté une anémie des mieux caractérisées, et le lendemain même de sa visite la belle jeune femme se faisait conduire à l'un des abattoirs de Paris...

[...]

Tous les jours, la pâle jeune femme se rendait à l'abattoir à l'heure des hécatombes ; elle pénétrait d'un pas dolent dans la vaste enceinte aux dalles rouges, et là un garçon boucher, semblable au sacrificateur antique, lui présentait, dans une coupe de pur cristal, le sang d'un bœuf qu'il venait d'immoler.

[...] elle se familiarisa peu à peu avec l'horreur d'un pareil tableau ; sa lèvre décolorée se trempa bientôt sans frisson à la coupe de sang, et elle finit par assister insensible et froide au spectacle poignant de ces égorgements quotidiens.  
(PIEUV: 124)

#### VIII.4.7

– Il y a des pieuvres... à Paris ?...

– J'en ai connu.

– Vous ?

– Et plus d'un sont morts pour les avoir rencontrées !

Je gardai le silence. – Mon interlocuteur poursuivit :

– C'est la même grâce indolente, dit-il l'œil fixé sur le poulpe qui continuait ses évolutions, la même faculté de fascination, le même appareil formidable pour surprendre et retenir sa proie. Tout est charmant d'ailleurs dans son apparence. Sa vue n'a rien qui épouvante ; le corps a des ondulations invitantes ; la nuit, elle se fait belle, elle s'allume, s'illumine, elle est phosphorescente, et l'on peut l'apercevoir, au-dessous de soi, dans les profondes ténèbres, épanouie en une irradiation blême !

[...]

« Une fois accroché à ses tentacules, vous ne vous appartenez plus ; vous lui appartenez... vous vous sentez pénétrer par *des bouches avides et sensuelles* ; l'effort que vous tentez pour vous arracher à *cette hideuse succion* ne fait que resserrer davantage le lien qui vous retient, et vous vous épuisez vainement, sans espoir, contre un monstre muet, sourd peut-être et d'autant plus implacable qu'il est invulnérable !

« Car la pieuvre n'a pas de cœur tangible... Son corps, vous l'avez vu, est un composé de matières gluantes, fuyantes, impalpables, que le croc le plus dur ne peut pas même déchirer... une viscosité qui a une volonté !

(PIEUV: 505-6, original emphases removed and my emphases added)



## VIII.5 – CORPUS TEXT QUOTATIONS, CHAPTER V

### VIII.5.1

Les Européens, habitués à vivre au milieu de centres civilisés, dans ces villes dont les fondations reposent sur la longue histoire du passé, ont peine à évoquer dans leur imagination les perspectives sans fin d'un monde encore inexploré.

Les Alpes donnent une faible idée des montagnes Rocheuses ; les Rocky Mountains forment l'amoncellement le plus grandiose que la nature ait entassé en un jour de convulsions. Ce sont blocs sur blocs, masses sur masses, pics se dressant sur d'autres pics, plateaux superposés à d'autres plateaux, et, courant à travers les grandeurs colossales, des vallons, des défilés, des sentiers que jamais pied humain n'a foulés... gouffres dont la sonde n'a point touché le fond, torrents bondissant à travers les crêtes et se précipitant avec un bruit terrible dans des abîmes aux parois de rochers gigantesques. (NYORK: 171)

### VIII.5.2

[...] c'est une triste vérité que le monde des affaires est infesté de misérables, sans feu ni lieu, sans honneur ni probité, qui passent leur vie à tondre les imbéciles et à élever leur fortune sur la ruine des honnêtes gens.

[...]

– La conscience publique se révolte, accentua Bam du ton d'un prédicateur wesleyan chapitrant ses ouailles [...] Il est temps de revenir aux règles de la saine probité... Il est temps de chasser à coups de martinet ces vendeurs déshonnêtes qui ont transformé le temple en un vaste bazar d'infamie ! [...] il n'est jamais trop tard pour ramener les égarés... pour ouvrir les yeux à ces dupes qui acceptent pour dollars sonnants les billevesées les plus ridicules... pour guérir, en un mot, cette fièvre malsaine qui ronge les forces vives de notre glorieuse Amérique ! [...] Perçons à jour ces intrigues odieuses, et on verra fuir aux quatre coins de l'horizon ces infâmes contempteurs de la conscience publique, ces dilapidateurs de la fortune de la jeune et vaillante Amérique ! (NYORK: 57)

### VIII.5.3

[...] qu'est-ce que vous comptez faire ?

– Nous ne le savons pas encore. Nous chercherons...

– Dans quel genre ? Je suppose que vous n'avez pas l'idée de gagner ici votre vie à roucouler comme des rossignols ?... [When Clump first finds Michaël and Jemmy, they are singing to earn money]

– Oh ! no, nous voudrions entrer dans un bureau... dans le commerce...

– Peste ! Vous n'y allez pas de main morte !... mais, après tout, est-ce bien là ce qu'il vous faut ? Avoir été habitué au grand air, et aller s'enfermer du matin au soir dans une de ces boîtes infectes, à aligner des chiffres et à enregistrer des balles de coton... c'est bien dur...

– Nous nous y habituerons.

– S’habituer ! quelle erreur ! Tenez, moi qui vous parle, il m’est arrivé... plusieurs fois dans ma vie... d’être obligé... par mes occupations... de rester enfermer... hum !... pendant quelques mois... eh bien ! c’était un vrai supplice...

Le brave Clump négligeait de dire où et pourquoi il avait été enfermé. Il ne s’agissait pas précisément d’un bureau de banque. (NYORK: 112)

#### VIII.5.4

Un mot sur la profession qu’exerçait, au 17<sup>e</sup> étage de cette maison de Broadway, les deux gentlemen qui répondaient au nom de Boomerang et à celui de Cowland.

La police, aux États-Unis, s’occupe des affaires criminelles... quelquefois.

Elle ne s’occupe jamais des vols.

Le principe là-bas est qu’il ne faut pas se laisser voler.

Si on se laisse voler, c’est que le voleur est plus malin, plus adroit, plus intelligent, – pour employer l’expression américaine : plus smart.

Tant pis pour le volé... C’est une partie qu’on a perdue, voilà tout, dans l’âpre struggle for life.

Mais tout le monde a ses faiblesses !

Il y a des gens, quand ils ont été volés, qui tiennent à rentrer dans leur argent.

Ce n’est pas du ressort de la police, encore moins de la Justice...

Et puis, on risquerait d’être volé une seconde fois...

[...]

Donc, on ne considère plus la chose comme un délit. C’est tout bonnement une affaire...

*Business !*

On cherche à transiger avec ses voleurs.

Pour ces transactions... délicates, il y a des agences spéciales qui s’appellent des bureaux de police privée, – *private detective office*.

Ces maisons entretiennent d’excellents rapports avec tous les voleurs, escrocs, cambrioleurs et autres escarpes connus. Et elles essayent de nouer des relations avec les autres...

Quelques-uns de ces *detective offices* passent pour ne pas se contenter de chercher les voleurs...

Elles organisent de jolis dégringolages [*sic*], des escroqueries chouettes, des cambriolages épatants. Nous devons dire que l’honorable maison *Boomerang and Cowland* devait être rangée dans cette catégorie. (BAS: 523-4)

#### VIII.5.5

[...] Jean Robin avait acheté un immense hôtel entouré de magnifiques jardins, avenue des Champs-Élysées ;

[...] On démolissait ledit hôtel pour mettre à sa place le palais du milliardaire à New-York, tout simplement. [...]

– [...] « J’ai acheté à Paris une propriété admirablement belle et bien située que je connais de longue date, pour y avoir un peu travaillé, quand j’étais encore aux Beaux-Arts.

« Il y a sur cette propriété un tas de moellons très laid que vous appelez un hôtel ; il me gêne et je le fais enlever.

« Reste à le remplacer par quelque chose de mieux... Ce serait l'affaire d'un mois s'il s'agissait d'une bicoque quelconque. Mais, nous voulons de l'art... et, là, le temps fait beaucoup à l'affaire.

« Savez-vous combien il en faudrait à vos architectes pour reconstituer la demeure où vous vous trouvez actuellement... Cinquante ans, et ils n'en sortiraient pas.

« Songez que j'ai mis dix années à la créer et à la décorer, et que deux cents sculpteurs ou artistes dignes de ce nom y ont travaillé sans relâche.

« Cela forme un tout que j'aime avec passion, comme l'œuvre de ma vie ; aussi je l'emporte avec moi, — ou plutôt avant moi.

« On va donc déménager mon immeuble avec ce qui est dedans ; et ce sera l'affaire d'une saison pour tout remettre en place.

« L'hiver prochain, j'espère bien avoir l'honneur de vous recevoir dans cette même demeure... avenue des Champs-Élysées... [...]. » (BAS: 198-9)

### VIII.5.6

Combien ces créations de villes nouvelles sont différentes de ce qu'ont dû être jadis celles des cités européennes. Ces grandes agglomérations qui s'appellent Paris ou Londres se sont formées peu à peu, à travers de longues années, sans plan préconçu, sans que ceux-là mêmes qui les créaient comprissent l'importance qu'elles devaient avoir un jour.

L'Américain construit sa ville d'un seul coup, comme il ferait d'une machine. Il pose d'abord les pièces principales, qui sont : le temple, l'hôtel de ville, l'auberge cosmopolite, les bureaux du journal. Il trace les rues qui doivent laisser passer l'air et la lumière, et établir les communications les plus faciles, C'est un bâtiment multiple dont il connaît d'avance le corps principal, les étages et les ailes.

Black-Hawk était encore dans la période embryonnaire ; mais le plan était là, sous les yeux de tous, soutenu sur deux piquets. Le pasteur regardait attendant son église, le journaliste attendant son imprimerie. Et tous travaillaient, chacun choisissant d'avance la part qui lui serait dévolue dans cette création. Les pièces prenaient leur place, comme sous les doigts d'un enfant les morceaux détachés d'un jeu de patience. (NYORK: 192-3)

### VIII.5.7

La jeune Amérique est la terre des prodiges, des merveilles et des miracles...

La vie y est intense, formidable, rapide, foudroyante... La circulation déconcerte notre imagination routinière, paresseuse et timorée de « Vieux-Monde » et de « Fins-de-Siècle ».

La grande République a ses rois... rois étranges, féériques et titanesques : le roi de l'Or, le roi des Chemins de fer, le roi du Pétrole... le roi de l'Électricité : Edison, saluez ! et Barnum, le roi du Boniment... en avant la grosse caisse ! Zim-boum !

Le Français Jean Robin (devenu par américanisme John Robbin) était le *Roi de la Pierre*...

Oh ! très fort, *le great John*, comme on l'appelait avec une familiarité enthousiaste... Il avait construit des quartiers entiers de New-York et de Chicago,

bâti des maisons en cinq jours, des palais en six semaines et des villes en trois mois.  
(BAS: 197, emphases in original)

### VIII.5.8

Passons dans l'autre Monde, s'il vous plaît.

Oh ! entendons-nous bien !

Nous ne voulons pas parler de l'Empire des Refroidis ou des Macchabées.

Non!... cet autre monde où nous allons transporter nos lecteurs, avec une rapidité, kif le câble sous-marin, pour en revenir idem, c'est encore le nouveau monde... l'Amérique !...

*Amérique !... une des grandes injustices commises par l'humanité, cette vieille garce!... Christophe Colomb découvre un monde!... pour le récompenser, on donne à ce monde le nom du sieur Améric Vespuce, qui y est allé après lui, tout flambard mais beau dernier !<sup>1</sup>*

Enfin, passons ! L'histoire n'est faite que de roseries et de cochonneries de cet acabit, et il y en a de plus roides. (BAS: 314, my emphasis)

### VIII.5.9

Victor Hugo a donné dans *Notre-Dame* une vue générale du vieux Paris, prise à vol d'oiseau. – C'est une des meilleures études qui aient été faites. – A l'ampleur magistrale du style, à la netteté du dessin, à la profusion des détails, à l'harmonie et à la profondeur de l'ensemble, on reconnaît la main du maître qui l'a tracée. C'est la vérité prise sur le fait, – le mouvement, la couleur, l'air, le soleil, la vie enfin, rien n'y manque, tout y est étudié, creusé, approfondi... C'est le vieux Paris du XV<sup>e</sup> siècle qui se réveille, se meut, s'agite, au milieu des ruines réédifiées du passé !

Puissance incomparable du génie ! (VIEUX I: 170-1)

### VIII.5.10

Faut-il plaindre, faut-il envier le sort de ces plantes humaines qui naissent, vivent et s'engraissent sur la couche où Dieu les a placées : l'homme qui est mort sur la croix des douleurs terrestres, répandant goutte à goutte son sang et ses larmes pour l'humanité qui le regarde indifférente, est-il donc plus aux yeux de Dieu, que celui dont la vie s'est écoulée pâle et incolore, et qui a passé sans même laisser derrière lui, sur la terre qu'il a foulée, la trace de ses pas incertains ? Mystère insondable, devant lequel les siècles se sont plus d'une fois arrêtés ; énigme redoutable qui a fait blanchir et trembler plus de vingt générations de philosophes et de penseurs... (VIEUX III: 4-5)

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<sup>1</sup> Flaubert's *Dictionnaire des idées reçues* entry on 'AMÉRIQUE' reads 'Bel exemple d'injustice : c'est Colomb qui la découvrit et elle tient son nom d'Améric Vespuce. [...] (1999: 418).

### VIII.5.11

Au fond, tout se ressemble : qui a vu Paris, Venise, Constantinople et un douar quelconque a tout vu. Partout, il retrouvera les mêmes impressions : que les baies soient de Naples, de Lisbonne ou de Buenos-Ayres, l'émotion ressentie est toujours identique. Les questions de degrés sont insignifiantes.

Le soleil n'est pas sans monotonie, qu'il brûle furieusement, comme aux tropiques, ou qu'il pâlisce, comme en pays scandinave. [...]

J e m'ennuyais effroyablement et rien ne pouvait dissiper cette lourdeur morale qui oppresse et déprime. [...]

Où aller maintenant ? En Sibérie ? J'y retrouverais sous le neige les pas des Occidentaux. Au Japon ? Voici qu'il se civilisait ! Au Cambodge, en Annam ? Pour y coudoyer des fonctionnaires et y voir le déballage des marchandises fabriquées au faubourg Saint-Denis ou à Birmingham, sinon à Berlin ou à Stuttgart !...

Était-il donc vrai que, selon le mot des anciens, il n'y avait rien de nouveau sous le soleil et que la planète ne pouvait plus m'offrir un spectacle qui me réjouit ou même – car j'aurais tout préféré à la monotonie – m'épouvantât ! (MVILLE: 3-4)

### VIII.5.12

– Mais, père Châtelain, dit un autre laboureur, on a parlé dans les temps d'une manière de ferme où des jeunes voleurs, qui avaient eu, malgré ça, une très bonne conduite tout de même, apprenaient l'agriculture, et étaient soignés, choyés comme de petits princes ?

– C'est vrai, mes enfants ; il y a du bon là-dedans ; c'est humain et charitable de ne jamais désespérer des méchants ; mais faudrait faire aussi espérer les bons. Un honnête jeune homme, robuste et laborieux, ayant envie de bien faire et de bien apprendre, se présenterait à cette ferme de jeunes ex-voleurs, qu'on lui dirait : « Mon gars, as-tu un brin volé et vagabondé ?

« – Non.

« – Eh bien ! Il n'y a pas de place ici pour toi. » (MP: 341)

### VIII.5.13

Assassin... tu as plongé des créatures de Dieu dans la nuit éternelle... les ténèbres de l'éternité commenceront pour toi dans cette vie... aujourd'hui... tout à l'heure... [...] Je serais aussi criminel que toi si, en te punissant, je ne satisfaisais qu'une vengeance, si juste qu'elle fût... Loin d'être stérile comme la mort... ta punition doit être féconde ; loin de te damner... elle te peut racheter... Si pour te mettre hors d'état de nuire... [...] je te plonge dans une nuit impénétrable... seul... avec le souvenir de tes forfaits... c'est pour que tu contemples incessamment leur énormité... Oui... pour toujours isolé du monde extérieur, tu seras forcé de regarder toujours en toi... (MP: 164)

### VIII.5.14

[...] la peine de mort sera peut-être remplacée par un châtiment terrible, mais qui donnera au condamné le temps du repentir... de l'expiation, et qui ne retranchera pas violemment de ce monde une créature de Dieu...

L'aveuglement mettra le meurtrier dans l'impossibilité de s'évader et de nuire désormais à personne... (MP: 1020)

Nous croyons, nous, que dans quelques crimes, tels que le parricide, ou autres forfaits qualifiés, l'*aveuglement* et un isolement perpétuel mettraient un condamné dans l'impossibilité de nuire, et le puniraient d'une manière mille fois plus redoutable, tout en lui laissant le temps du repentir et de la rédemption. (MP: 1229)

### VIII.5.15

Autour de moi une atmosphère visible, d'un mauve très dilué, avec, tout au fond, des teintes dégradées, comme dans l'arc-en-ciel, allant au bleu céleste, au violet serein et pur... En même temps, un bruissement frappait mon oreille, qui n'était ni d'instruments connus, harpes, violons ou hautbois, ni – non plus – de voix humaines, et qui pourtant participait de toutes ces harmonies, quelque chose d'une suavité inexprimable.

Puis encore une chose très exquise et très difficile à exprimer, une flottaison de parfum qui m'enveloppait comme un impondérable duvet aromal, fluide de senteur volatilisée, où je retrouvais à peine discernables les plus ténues essences de la rose, du muguet, du benjoin – ou plutôt, non, de tout cela qui n'était point cela, mais une vapeur faite de toutes les vapeurs, distillées, sublimées jusqu'à n'être plus qu'une ambiance odorante.

Je me sentais bercé par cette triple sensation – couleur, musique, parfum – et c'était une pacification délicieuse [...]. (MVILLE: 46)

## VIII.6 – CORPUS TEXT QUOTATIONS, CHAPTER VI

### VIII.6.1

De tous côtés nous recevons des lettres qui nous demandent quand paraîtront, dans le *Petit Journal*,

#### LES NOUVEAUX MYSTÈRES DE PARIS

Nos correspondants nous disent aussi d'augmenter considérablement le nombre d'exemplaires que nous leur envoyons.

Beaucoup de nos abonnés nous annoncent que, pour propager l'œuvre de M. Aurélien Scholl, ils s'occupent de faire abonner chacun un ou deux de leurs amis.

[...]

Nous préparons une lettre-circulaire contenant toutes nos instructions relatives au tirage extraordinaire qu'on nous demande, et, d'ici deux jours, nos correspondants la recevront.

Nous remercions sincèrement, avec effusion, nos abonnés, qui veulent bien se donner tant de peine pour répandre le *Petit Journal* et augmenter le nombre de nos lecteurs. Merci, merci, mille fois merci !

(PJ 26 September 1866)

### VIII.6.2

Le *Tintamarre* va [...] à partir de dimanche prochain, commencer la publication d'une série de

#### ROMANS-ROBINET

dans lesquels il s'efforcera de semer avec une prodigalité princière crimes, empoisonnements, squelettes, poisons, incendies, enfants à deux têtes, pendaisons, suicides, etc., etc.

Le *Tintamarre* fait appel à ses rédacteurs de tout sexe ;

Il payera le *Roman-Robinet* non à la ligne comme sont payés MM. Ponson du Terrail et Aurélien Scholl, c'est trop commun, mais bien *au crime*.

Ernest est chargé de pointer les horreurs des *Romans-Robinet* ; mais il est expressément interdit aux romanciers de tuer, par erreur, deux fois le même personnage, et dans ce cas il ne leur sera payé que comme crime simple.

[...]

Chaque feuilleton contiendra, au maximum, onze assassinats.

Au-dessous de ce chiffre, l'acheteur aura droit de se faire rembourser son argent.

(*Tintamarre* 28 October 1866)

### VIII.6.3

Les *Mystères de Paris* de 1866 ne sont pas les *Mystères de Paris* de 1844 [sic].

Allez donc retrouver le tapis-franc de la rue aux Fèves, M. Haussmann l'a exproprié.

Ce n'est plus seulement dans les bouges qu'on découvre le génie du mal, l'oppresser, le traître, le fléau des sociétés modernes, nous n'avons plus la commodité des *souricières* pour aider nos études...

Il n'y a plus de bandits dans les buttes Chaumont, depuis que M. Alphand en a fait un parc.

Paul Niquet a des ananas à sa devanture,

Et les détenus ne racontent plus l'histoire de *Gringalet et de Coupe-en-Deux*... depuis l'établissement du système cellulaire. (PJ 30 September 1866)

### VIII.6.4

– Je suis le baron de Maucourt, continua le jeune homme, M. de Navarran sort de chez moi, il est arrivé par l'express, et sa voiture, plus rapide que vos jambes, lui a donné le temps de me charger de sa commission...

– Quelle commission ? demanda Jean en portant sa main à sa ceinture.

(PJ 6 October 1866)

Les clous furent enlevés avec une tenaille, et le couvercle céda.

Alors Monseigneur poussa un cri de rage et de stupéfaction.

Aly recula épouvanté...

Le cercueil était vide ! (PJ 14 October 1866)

Je consultais le plan de l'hôtel, et je vis que, au fonds du puits, un passage était clairement indiqué.

Je me penchais pour voir si je découvrirais quelque chose ; mais je ne vis que ma mine effarée se reflétant dans l'eau.

Il était trop tard pour reculer ; je saisis la corde et me laissai glisser...

(PJ 16 October 1866)

### VIII.6.5

Le lendemain, on put lire dans les journaux du soir :

« Deux agents ont ramassé la nuit dernière une jeune femme évanouie dans une allée des Champs-Élysées. Cette infortunée a répondu à toutes les questions avec une telle incohérence qu'on s'est demandé si elle n'est pas devenue folle après avoir assisté à quelque crime non encore découvert. Cette femme, jeune et d'une rare beauté, a été mise à la disposition de M. le commissaire de police du quartier, qui a pris, dans son intérêt, les mesures d'usage. »

Ce qui veut dire, en bon français, que Louise Deslions avait été enfermée à la Salpêtrière. (PJ 24 October 1866)



### VIII.6.6

Le lecteur n'a pas oublié que les faits que nous venons de rapporter étaient contenus dans le manuscrit remis à Jean Deslions par le comte de Navarran.

Jean s'interrompit au milieu de sa lecture.

Il ne put s'empêcher d'établir un rapprochement entre ce coup de bêche donné au garde de bois de Vincennes et le coup de fusil qu'il avait tiré sur M. Raoul de Villepont.

C'est à la suite du meurtre de ce garde que M. de Navarran avait pénétré les secrets de la rue Saint-Louis.

Et Jean, à son tour, allait se trouver pris dans cet engrenage de fer parce qu'il avait tué M. de Villepont. (PJ 18 October 1866)

### VIII.6.7

A ceux qui seraient tentés de nous accuser d'invraisemblance, nous répondrons que *tout ce que nous racontons est arrivé*.

Nous n'avons fait que réunir et grouper les événements.

Les caves de l'épicier de la rue Saint-Jacques, fourgat de la bande Poulain, nous ont fourni les souterrains de l'hôtel des Vingt-et-Un.

Le comte de Castres et le Danois Mac Labussière (voir le procès des *Habits-Noirs*) nous ont servi les types du vicomte de Floustignac et de Combalou... Il en est ainsi pour tout le reste.

Il n'y a pas un fait, si étrange qu'il paraisse au lecteur, que nous n'ayons emprunté à la vie réelle, c'est-à-dire à l'exception sociale, aux procès, aux annales de la police.

Ceux qui ne connaissent, ni les galeries des Buttes-Chaumont ni les Catacombes, sur lesquelles ouvraient, il y a quelques années, toutes les caves des quartiers du Panthéon et du Luxembourg, diront que les souterrains du *fourgat* sont une sotte invention.

Ceux qui ignorent que, depuis 18[45?] on compte à Paris plus de cinquante bandes de malfaiteurs organisées, ayant une administration, ceux-là refuseront de croire à la société des Vingt-et-un.

Certes, le crime est l'exception !

Cependant tous les crimes ont été commis.

Ce que nous avons raconté n'est peut-être arrivé qu'une fois – mais c'est arrivé... (PJ 30 October 1866)

### VIII.6.8

Versailles, le 8 janvier 1867.

Monsieur Timothée Trimm,

Etant un lecteur assidu du *Petit Journal*, naturellement je suis avec soin l'intéressant feuilleton de M. Aurélien Scholl. Dans les *Nouveaux mystères de Paris*, il est parlé du fameux saule qui ombrage le tombeau de Napoléon 1<sup>er</sup>, saule dont un certain nombre de boutures apocryphes ont été importées en France.

Le saule pleureur du tombeau n'en est pas un mais bien un acacia. [...]

tout [...] au premier coup d'œil, peut lui faire confondre avec un saule pleureur, il n'est donc pas étonnant que des personnes peu versées dans l'histoire naturelle des plantes aient pu s'tromper.

[...]

Agréez, etc.

C. LEJEUNE,  
horticulteur à Versailles.

(PJ 14 January 1867)<sup>2</sup>

### VIII.6.9

Depuis l'annonce de cet attrayant ouvrage, le domicile de M. Aurélien Scholl ne désemplit pas, et les visiteurs ont, je vous l'assure, des physionomies bien singulières.

[...]

\*

\* \*

A cet excellent possesseur de valeurs immobilières [a landlord fearful that Scholl's novel will reproduce Sue's damaging depiction of the *île des Ravageurs*], a succédé une dame sur le retour, ayant le visage *fait* avec du rouge et du blanc et *quelques pièces de dix sous dans sa monnaie*, comme dirait une *Louve* d'aujourd'hui, c'est-à-dire quelques fils d'argent dans ses cheveux couleur de bronze.

– Vous ne me reconnaissez pas? dit-elle.

– Pas le moins du monde, fit le romancier.

– Quand Eugène Sue me mit en scène, j'avais dix-huit ans à peine, j'étais la dernière grisette, coiffée d'un petit bonnet à rubans cerise, le nez relevé, la bouche assez grande pour faire voir mes trente-deux perles, plus trois fossettes et un grain de beauté, et ma taille était tellement parfaite, que je ne portais pas de corset... par économie.

– Vous vous nommez ?

– Rigolette, première du nom, la même que les *Mystères de Paris* ont mise en vue: si vous parlez de moi aujourd'hui que j'ai quarante-six ans, tout le monde connaîtra mon état civil, et je serai privée du bénéfice du proverbe : *On n'a que l'âge que l'on paraît !*

– Ma toute belle, a répondu le galant auteur, je ne mettrai pas de rides à votre gracieux pastel...

\*

\* \*

Après cette brave femme s'est présenté un homme de quarante ans, à la cravate rouge, à la chaîne de similor, à la pipe culottée fumante aux lèvres.

– Il est inutile de me ressusciter, a-t-il dit ; j'étais un gamin quand je donnais des coups de pieds au Maître d'école ; aujourd'hui, j'ai une position sociale qui me permet de jouir de l'estime publique : je suis entrepreneur... de bouts de cigares...

– Et vous vous appelez...

– Tortillard, l'ancien Tortillard, toutes mes anciennes connaissances ont *éteint leur gaz*... La Chouette a jeté son dernier cri... Pique-Vinaigre colonise la

<sup>2</sup> See Scholl's references to the 'saule pleureur' (PJ 3 and 4 January 1867).

Nouvelle-Amérique ; le Chourineur a reçu un coup de couteau en voulant sauver monseigneur Rodolphe, et le Squelette, ne pouvant, comme Mahomet mourant, se tourner du côté de Lorient, a rendu son âme à Brest... Je suis un homme établi... ne me faites pas tort en révélant mes anciennes frasques.

– Mon bon ami, a répondu le romancier, je ne marche dans les souliers de personne... il ne sera pas question de vous. (PJ 30 September 1866)

#### VIII.6.10

[Mon père] avait imaginé quelque chose d'imprévu et de théâtral, en rapport avec les magnifiques décorations du club. Dans le salon principal, il avait tendu une riche draperie, derrière laquelle étaient placés ma harpe et mon piano. Lorsque j'entrai là pour la première fois, le bruit des conversations effraya ma timidité. Mon père me fit asseoir au piano.

– N'ayez pas peur, miss Suky, me dit-il, et chantez de votre plus belle voix ; personne ne peut vous voir.

Il disait vrai. La draperie interceptait complètement les regards. Je passai mes doigts sur les touches, et quelques voix de joueurs s'élevèrent de l'autre côté de la draperie. (LOND: 197-8)

#### VIII.6.11

[Mon parrain] m'appela pour lui extraire la canine qui le gênait... C'est ici que la sueur du remords inonde *mon front criminel*, et que je vais faire une horrible révélation !...

LE SOURINEUR.

J'en ai la bouche sèche !...

LES DEUX FEMMES.

Achevez donc !

PANDOLPHE.

Ça vous est bien aisé à dire... Je ne sais pas si j'en aurai la force !... Le patient se plaça sur un fauteuil, je pris la clé de Garangeau d'une main féroce... Gogo me revint à la pensée... et pour me venger des refus de ce parrain entêté...

LA GOUAILLEUSE.

Vous eûtes de la barbarie...

PANDOLPHE, avec égarement.

Au lieu de sa mauvaise dent, de lui arracher une mollaïre [*sic*], qui se portait parfaitement bien !...

LE SOURINEUR et LES DEUX FEMMES, détournant la tête.

Atrocité !...

PANDOLPHE, montrant sa chemise.

La voilà !... cette dent accusatrice... Je l'ai fait monter en épingle !...

(PASSY: 35, my emphasis)

### VIII.6.12

– Qui qu'il est ? s'écria madame Pipelet coiffée de sa perruque blonde à la Titus... qui qu'il est ? C'est le roi des locataires, entendez-vous, mal-embouchés. Et comme les recors prenaient le parti de s'en aller, elle leur lança un poêlon plein de panade qu'elle portait à la famille Morel.

– Et alllllez donc ! ajouta la vieille portière, puis elle cria à tue-tête, d'une voix aiguë à percer les tympans d'un sourd... Alfred ! tape dessus, vieux chéri !... Ils ont voulu faire les Bédouins avec ta *Stasie*. Ces deux indécents... ils m'ont saccagé... tape dessus à coup de balai... dis à l'écaillère de t'aider... à vous ! à vous ! au chat ! au chat ! au voleur ! kiss ! kiss !... brrrr !... hou... hou !... tape dessus ! vieux chéri !! boum !... boum !!...<sup>3</sup>

*Peut-être, dans ce monologue, nous sommes-nous un peu laissé entraîner par l'habitude de la charge, peut-être avons-nous fait là une tartine de mauvais goût ; passez-nous quelque chose, car nous avons copié littéralement.*

(CHAM: 126-7, my emphasis)

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<sup>3</sup> This section of text is, indeed, almost completely identical to the hypotext (MP: 448-9).

## VIII.7 – CORPUS TEXT SYNOPSES

Synopses are provided here for those corpus texts whose plots feature significantly in my analyses. These are listed in alphabetical order, by abbreviation (see p. 11 above). For full bibliographical details of these texts, refer to section IX.1.

### **LOND – *Les Mystères de Londres***

Fergus O'Breane is in love with Mary MacFarlane, sister of Angus, but his villainous rival, le comte de White Manor, has him falsely convicted of attempted murder and transported to Australia, from where he escapes. Fergus amasses money, information and contacts as a pirate, sowing seeds of anti-colonial agitation around the world, so that when he later arrives in London, as the marquis de Rio-Santo, he is served by all of the city's criminals and corrupt professionals, as well as 10,000 armed Irish nationalists who have infiltrated the city.

Before going to London, Fergus, on his way back from Australia with Randal Grahame, arrives first in Scotland. Angus buys Crewe Castle for Fergus, but the latter is involved in a series of crimes, having Angus's brother-in-law, McNab, abducted and murdered in front of his son, Stephen, and also abducting and abusing Harriet Perceval, her twin brother Frank an unwilling witness to the events, which will cause her to die of shame. Fifteen years later, Fergus will head to a London strikingly reminiscent of his Scottish castle, full of secret doors and underground passageways. Meanwhile, White Manor rejects the pregnant Mary. Susannah, Mary's daughter, falls into the hands of sinister Jewish moneylender Ismail Spencer (who, at other points in the novel also poses as Tyrrel l'Aveugle and Sir Edmund Mackensie).

In London, the action opens with Tyrrel l'Aveugle employing a distraught and destitute Susannah to pose as the princesse de Longueville. Paddy O'Chrane pays young criminal Snail to help him steal a ring from a royal mistress. The ransom will go towards the anti-English attack.

When Rio-Santo and Clary MacFarlane, Angus's niece, see each other in a city church, they become mutually infatuated, much to the disappointment of Clary's cousin Stephen. When Dr. Moore is looking for a girl to experiment on to save the life of Mary Trevor, and White Manor's lackeys are looking for a girl to entertain him, Clary and her sister Anna are kidnapped and drugged by Bob Lantern. Angus, in London for night and staying at the same inn where the girls are being held by the Gruffs, sees them bundled, unconscious, into a boat and swims after it. Lantern beats Angus off with an oar. He manages to stagger to Rio-Santo's home, where his old friend watches over him for six days. Torn between loyalty to 'Fergus' and the desire to avenge his brother-in-law's murder, Angus attacks Rio-Santo.

Brian de Lancaster has been in love with Susannah, unaware that she is actually his niece, since seeing her when he went to ask Ismail for a loan. He clashes with White Manor, his elder brother, who is unwilling to share his inheritance. Aided by Tyrrel, White Manor has Brian imprisoned in an asylum, so the conspirators can maintain control of Susannah. He gets out, but writes a letter, informing the devastated Susannah that he can no longer see her, because he is her uncle.

Rio-Santo poses a threat to the romantic projects of both Stephen MacNab, who is in love with his cousin Clary, and Frank Perceval who, having returned from

travelling, expects to marry Mary Trevor. Rio-Santo steps in to claim Mary and Frank is shot during a duel between the two men. Dr. Moore tries to murder Frank as he recovers, but he is saved by Stephen and his vigilant butler. Mary Trevor's father sees Susannah kiss Frank, a scene which, unbeknownst to him, has been deliberately staged by Rio-Santo in order to jeopardize the relationship between Mary and Frank.

Frank and Stephen have Fergus/Rio-Santo arrested for his crimes, just as he is about to give instructions to start the anti-English attack. Angus tells the police of the political plot, who make moves to foil it, before murdering the Gruffs and drowning himself in the Thames. Rio-Santo is found guilty and sentenced to death, but escapes. Clary, who is hallucinating and believes that Rio-Santo has rejected her for her sister, shoots and kills him.

## **LOND2 – *Les Mystères de Londres [...]. Drame en cinq actes et dix tableaux***

Suzannah works in a tavern for the Gruffs, leaving her sister Clary with la mère Jacobs. Perceval finds Irishman Donnor d'Arleigh begging and takes him for something to eat. He tells Perceval that his two daughters, Suzannah and Clary, are living in London, but Suzannah has not been in touch for a year, so he has come to look for them. Perceval gives Donnor his card and assures him he will want for nothing while trying to find them. When a customer accuses Gruff of not giving him his change, Suzannah is blamed and Mistress Gruff strikes her. Moore finds Suzannah heading towards the Thames and promises her money for her father and sister. Suzannah thinks he is trying to buy her for sex and tells him she is in love with a nobleman. The man in question, Rio-Santo, passes by in a carriage. Moore says he can bridge the gap between them and gives her his card, urging her to come and see him.

Suzannah, now disguised as the princesse de Longueville, declares her love to Rio-Santo, explaining that she first saw him when working as a servant for Ismail Spencer. Rio-Santo tells her he is too committed to his secret political projects to have time for affairs of the heart. Suzannah has suffered greatly since Ismail's death. A young woman showed her great kindness, but Suzannah lost her address and ended up at the auberge du roi Georges. She says he is prepared to do whatever is required of her, but Rio-Santo forbids Moore from involving her in his machinations.

Perceval, who has just returned from a year travelling, meets his old friend Gérard at a ceremony at Saint James's Palace. Gérard tells him that Mary Trevor is engaged to the imposing Rio-Santo. Lady Campbell tells Mary, her niece, that Perceval has forgotten all about her. Perceval tries to speak to Lady Campbell, but she turns him away. Gérard understands that Mary and Frank still love each other and that Frank will have to contend with both Rio-Santo and Lady Campbell, who controls Mary's father. Perceval explains how Lady Campbell tricked him by encouraging him to travel and promising him Mary's hand on his return. Perceval and Rio-Santo will fight each other in a duel. Meanwhile, Rio-Santo continues to rally men and collect money for his cause. Diamonds stolen from Lady Brompton are passed between the men and given to Suzannah to hide.

Moore tells Rio-Santo that Perceval will survive. Rio-Santo is unhappy about his arranged marriage to Mary, but Moore insists that it is necessary to further Rio-Santo's projects. Moore has gone against his master's orders, by involving Suzannah. He realizes she is the reason for Rio-Santo's change of heart over the marriage. Rio-Santo threatens to have Moore hanged for his numerous crimes and

orders him to help Perceval recover. Moore leaves, more determined than ever that the marriage between Mary and Rio-Santo will go ahead, and that Suzannah can be used to facilitate it. Perceval convalesces, tended to by Donnor and Gérard. Although the gentlemanly Rio-Santo is keen to step aside, Mary's aunt has been sending anonymous letters to make her believe Perceval has someone else. Donnor's suspicions of Moore grow. He gives Perceval a potion to incapacitate him, and Donnor is unable to stop him from drinking it. Suzannah arrives and, instructed by Moore, approaches Perceval and kisses his forehead, with Mary Trevor and her father looking on. Suzannah recognizes Mary as the young woman who helped her. She is overjoyed, but Mary, convinced Suzannah is Perceval's mistress, pushes her away. Suzannah also recognizes her father, but Moore threatens to hurt him if she tells him anything. Donnor is angry with her, and wants to know where her money and clothes have come from, but she keeps quiet.

Paddy tells the others that Suzannah has reported them to the police over the diamond theft. She arrives with the police and says she is prepared to identify the men in court, but is horrified to find Rio-Santo with them and realizes she has been used by them, and is implicated in their crimes. She promises to keep quiet. Rio-Santo explains that their organization is not just a criminal gang, but is dedicated to the liberation of Ireland. Fanny, Rio-Santo's confidante, will go to Dublin to inform their Irish leader that all is ready, and will return in five days.

Perceval arrives to see Suzannah, and asks that she tell the truth to Mary, who has sent his letters back. When she agrees to help, Perceval reveals that he has brought Donnor to hear her kind offer, and father and daughter are reconciled. Rio-Santo tells a distraught Suzannah that his marriage to Mary Trevor will go ahead. Clary and Suzannah are encouraged to wait at the roi Georges for their father, but are given a drugged Irish toddy. As Clary loses consciousness, Suzannah realizes what has happened and writes a note on a handkerchief as the boat arrives to collect them. Donnor arrives, hears Suzannah's cries for help and reads her note. He swims after the boat and manages to climb on board, throwing Moore into the water. They hurry back to tell Mary the truth.

Suzannah explains everything to Mary, but the marriage is still set to take place in one hour's time. Donnor appeals to Rio-Santo on behalf of his daughter, while Suzannah resolves to die. Rio-Santo says he loves her and will abandon all his projects for her, but the arrival of Fanny, back from Dublin, reminds him of the importance of the campaign to liberate Ireland. Suzannah stabs herself, but Fanny has a letter with her, which brings news of the death of O'Connell, the Irish leader, and the end of the struggle. Perceval will be reunited with Mary, and Rio-Santo is free to marry Suzannah.

## LOU – *Les Loups de Paris*

### I

In 1822, young revolutionary Jacques de Costebelle, condemned to death, convinces his kindly jailer, Pierre Lamalou, to free him for a few hours so that he can visit Marie de Mauvillers, who has given birth to his son. Returning to prison through the gorges d'Ollioules, Jacques is shot by Biscarre, a Toulon convict who worked for Marie's father as a *garde-chasse* and has been intent on revenge since she spurned his advances. Biscarre steals Marie's child. Jacques makes it back to prison, where he dies.

In 1840s Paris, Martial, a young painter, contemplates suicide. Leaving a manuscript entitled *Mon Histoire*, he throws himself into the Seine, but is saved by twins Droite and Gauche, of the Club des Morts. The society's members include Castigneau (Lamalou), Archibald de Thomerville, Sir Lionel Storigan, Armand de Bernaye and Marie de Mauvillers, who is now the marquise de Favereye (Jacques gave her an envelope to open a year after his death, entrusting her to his good friend, the marquis de Favereye). All have been pushed to the brink of suicide for different reasons, but have survived and are united by their altruism. Martial, who reminds Marie of her own lost son, tells them his story. His father was an expert in obscure languages who left France to work abroad. (Armand believes he witnessed the murder of Martial's father in Indo-China.) When Martial and his mother ran out of money, he decided to go to Paris to work as an artist, where he fell in love with Isabelle, la duchesse de Torrès, also known as le Ténia. He refused to sell his portrait of her to a rival (Sir Lionel of the Club des Morts), but she rejected him. Martial's mother was dying and a banker, Estremoz, had stolen their money. After his mother's death he returned to Paris, and became Isabelle's lover again (as Sir Lionel Storigan had shot himself). She humiliated him, wearing his mother's jewels when she went to the theatre with her lover. Martial resolved to kill himself. The other members vote in favour of accepting him into the Club des Morts.

Monsieur de Silvereal plans to poison his wife (Mathilde de Mauvillers), so that he can marry the duchesse de Torrès. He also plans to marry off his niece, Lucie de Favereye (daughter of Marie), to the duc de Belen. Biscarre (in the guise of *homme d'affaires* Mancal) eavesdrops on the conversation between the two men. Soëra, Armand's exotic servant, has to be restrained when he hears Mancal's voice. Belen and Silvereal were involved in a crime eight years ago in the East Indies. Silvereal threatens to blackmail Belen, who agrees to give him 500,000 F when he marries Lucie.

In an underground passage, Belen is surprised to find footprints, including those of a woman. He finds bookseller Germandret there (another of Biscarre's alter egos). Germandret tells Belen he has heard his conversation with Silvereal and knows he is not a real duc, but a criminal. Germandret says he can secure Lucie's hand in marriage for Belen, in exchange for two things. He must give him details of the 'trésor de l'Eni' and must also agree to look after a young man. The young man in question is 'Jacquot', the son of Marie and Jacques, whom Biscarre (who Jacques believes to be his 'oncle Jean') despises. He has tried, without success, to make a criminal of him. The Loups de Paris sabotage his work. Biscarre tells Jacquot the antipathy towards him is the result of jealousy; he is the comte de Cherlux and has a large inheritance (the real comte de Cherlux signed a fake will and *acte de reconnaissance* in exchange for 100,000F, and died two months later). Biscarre blackmails the duchesse de Torrès, as he (as Blasias) sold her the poison with which she murdered her husband. She hates Armand de Bernaye (the only man not to have succumbed to her charms), just as Biscarre hates Marie de Favereye. Biscarre orders her to seduce the comte de Cherlux (Jacquot), and drive him to crime.

Silvereal goes to see the duchesse de Torrès and says he will kill Mathilde and Armand if she will agree to be his. Inhaling the perfume of a drugged flower sends Silvereal into a trance. He admits that he and Belen killed the roi des Khmers. They tortured Pierre Martial to make him speak and, when he refused to do so, killed him. The papers detailing the location of the Khmer treasure are in Paris.

A drunken Muflier and Goniglu express their mistrust for 'Bisco', whose personal ambitions represent a threat to the Loups. Droite and Gauche take them to



stay with Archibald, who asks if they are willing to turn Biscarre in. Archibald and Lionel trick Biscarre into going to meet them, using Marie as a lure, but he turns the tables and takes them prisoner. Biscarre captures Droite and Gauche. Droite escapes, but Gauche is gagged then drugged. In a trance, he answers Biscarre's questions about the Club des Morts. When Armand and Droite arrive, Biscarre throws himself into the river. The bodies of Archibald and Lionel are found, but Biscarre has disappeared.

## II

Archibald has been saved and Lionel is alive, but insane. Biscarre knows who was behind the attack on him. Newspaper articles report the supposed drowning of Blasias and the financial collapse of the maison Mancal. Armand thinks Belen was involved in the murder of Martial's father, but proof can only come from Soëra, who hasn't spoken since hearing Belen's voice. The duchesse de Torrès has fallen in love with Cherlux (Jacques).

After an argument with his mentor, Belen, Jacques wanders aimlessly and gets drunk. The *Ours vert*, meeting place of the Loups, is under new management. Jacques is told about the Loups. The maison de la rue des Arcis has been destroyed by a fire started by la Brûleuse, Diouloufait's companion. Jacques pretends he is a doctor so he can get in to see her. The marquise de Favereye (Marie), her daughter Lucie and her friend Pauline de Saussay tend to the woman. La Brûleuse revives and identifies Jacques as the nephew of her assassin. Marie implores him to leave. A confused Jacques prepares to commit suicide, but he is interrupted by a declaration of love from the duchesse de Torrès, to whom he confesses his real name.

Mufler and Goniglu leave the hôtel de Thomerville for a night-time jaunt, but are struck over the head and abducted. Diouloufait, shot and captured by the police, appears before the *juge d'instruction*. He refuses to betray Biscarre, insisting he is dead rather than revealing his whereabouts, even though la Brûleuse has died at Biscarre's hands. Diouloufait appears to die, and his body is stolen. Mufler and Goniglu are held in the rat-infested underground of the Hôtel-Dieu, before being brought before the *Assises rouges* (the Loups' version of *cour d'assises*, presided over by Pierre le Cruel) for their betrayal of Biscarre. As the attention shifts to Biscarre, Diouloufait arrives. He refuses to tell them where Biscarre is. Biscarre himself then arrives, and has Pierre le Cruel, Mufler and Goniglu killed. He has been at the bagne de Rochefort, posing as another convict (who has actually escaped) in order to enlist the help of Exupère, a language specialist imprisoned for accusing an academic of plagiarism, in translating a document of the inscriptions taken from fragments of Belen's statue, so that the Loups can have the Khmer treasure. They need the paper and the missing third part of the statue and also must get rid of Club des Morts.

Meanwhile, Isabelle isolates Jacques. He sees Lucie de Favereye and Pauline de Saussay out riding, and saves the latter from a fall. They recognize him as the impostor at the bedside of la Brûleuse, but he swears he is honest and deserving of their esteem. Lucie believes him. When Lucie tells her mother that the comte de Cherlux (whose real name is Jacques) saved Pauline, Marie begins to make connections.

Martial is in love with Lucie. Marie urges him to be patient. When Belen asks her for Lucie's hand, Marie refuses. Belen asks her husband, using his knowledge of Marie's illegitimate child as a threat, but he also refuses. Belen wants revenge. Marie explains that she couldn't give Martial an answer straightaway, as

Lucie is not their real daughter. When Marie met the marquis de Favereye, he was a widower who had killed the villainous lover of his wayward fifteen-year-old daughter. The daughter then died in childbirth, leaving the marquis and Marie to bring up Lucie as their daughter.

Belen, it emerges, is in fact José Estremoz, the Portuguese banker responsible for the anguished death of Martial's mother. The real duc de Belen was killed in India and the false *acte de décès* of Estremoz signed by Silvereal. Armand, on a scientific mission to Siam/Cambodia saved Soëra, who is the son of Eni, the roi du feu. When Lionel has a startling vision, members of the Club des Morts rush to the hôtel de Belen, where the bodies of Belen and Silvereal have been found. Jacques is covered in blood...

### MP – *Les Mystères de Paris* (1989 [1842-3])

Rodolphe, prince of the fictional Gerolstein, ventures into the Cité district of Paris searching for the lost son of his friend, Madame Georges. His search brings him into contact with ex-convict le Chourineur and melancholy *fille perdue* la Goualeuse, also known as Fleur-de-Marie. Rodolphe will eventually discover her to be the long-lost daughter he thought dead, the result of a secret and doomed marriage to scheming social climber Sarah Mac-Gregor, which drew him into a violent disagreement with his father. A series of sub-plots see Rodolphe seek to outwit la Chouette, le Maître d'école, Tortillard and numerous dastardly accomplices.

In an entirely different social sphere, Rodolphe saves the unhappily married Clémence d'Harville from an ill-advised adulterous liaison, encouraging her to invest her energies in philanthropy. His search for Madame Georges's son brings him into contact with the destitute Morel family, their kind-hearted neighbour Rigolette, and concierges Monsieur and Madame Pipelet, the former terrorized by mischievous prankster Cabrion, as well as revealing the devious machinations of lawyer Jacques Ferrand. The Morel's eldest daughter has given birth to Ferrand's child, but is accused of infanticide. Morel is driven mad by his shame and by Ferrand's demands for money. François-Germain, the son of Madame Georges and le Maître d'école, is falsely accused of stealing money from Ferrand and sent to prison.

Rodolphe sends Fleur-de-Marie to the Bouqueval farm, where she is cared for by Madame Georges, but she is abducted by la Chouette and le Maître d'école and ends up in Saint-Lazare prison. A second abduction takes place at the hands of Ferrand's accomplices, who try to drown Fleur-de-Marie to prevent Rodolphe from discovering her true identity. Fleur-de-Marie is saved by la Louve, a friend from Saint Lazare, involved in a further sub-plot with her lover Martial and his villainous family. Rodolphe punishes le Maître d'école by blinding him. He in turn murders la Chouette as she mocks and abuses him. Rodolphe sends Cecily, an exotic temptress, to humiliate Ferrand. To save face, Ferrand is forced to set up a *banque des travailleurs sans ouvrage*. He is driven mad and dies.

Rodolphe sends le Chourineur to a new life in Algeria, but the devoted swashbuckler returns and dies saving Rodolphe's life, as the Prince leaves Paris for Gerolstein at the height of a rowdy carnival. Rodolphe and Sarah marry on the latter's deathbed, thus legitimizing their daughter. But Fleur-de-Marie, now la princesse Amélie, is tormented by feelings of guilt at her ignominious past. Refusing an offer of marriage, she enters a convent, only to die shortly afterwards.

## MVILLE – *Mystère-ville*

In a remote Chinese province, with the Boxer Revolution raging, Alcide Trémalet receives a blow to the head as he flees from his burning house. He wakes up in *Mystère-ville*, a colony of exiles with no knowledge of the French Revolution, whose customs date from the period of Louis XIV. Trémalet is brought before the High Court, for his illegal trespass into *Mystère-ville*, and condemned to death by sound, or ‘la Phonothanotose’.

While Trémalet awaits his sentence, the scientist Durand explains the origins of the mysterious city, founded by Protestants persecuted and expelled from Paris during Louis XVI’s revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1865, who fled in a special boat invented by Denis Papin. A volcanic eruption left them hemmed in by a wall of basalt and the community has lived cut off from the rest of the world for two hundred years, adapting to their new environment with help from the reified Papin. An artificial process is used to create synthetic food, complete with its tastes and nutritional qualities. Meals are taken at the ‘Louvre’ refectory, where diners eat by tapping out a musical score on a keyboard. The ‘Seine’ is a river of brightly coloured flowers, created using mineral injections.

Alcide finds himself bewitched by Isabelle Duval, the female executioner whose music is supposed to kill him. In fact, she prolongs the process so that the execution can be interrupted by a group of children, who challenge the High Court and secure Alcide’s freedom. He takes a job in the ‘usine phonique’ and marries Isabelle, their union having been approved by the ‘hématomètre’. But, as Alcide settles into *Mystère-ville*, the political rift between the *aromistes* (supporters of aromatic power) and the *phonistes* (advocates of sound energy) deepens. The former group want to use their aromatic technology to break through the rocks imprisoning them, in order to reach the Paris described by Alcide, while the latter take a conservative, isolationist stance, adamant that the mystery of the city must be preserved.

A plebiscite gives a large majority to the *aromistes*, who forge ahead with their plans. Isabelle is swept along in the political fervour, and separated from her husband. The perforation of the mountain provokes a new volcanic eruption, and widespread hysteria. As civil war looms and the city implodes, Alcide and Isabelle are reunited, and escape from the city in a flying basket.

## NOUV – *Les Mystères du nouveau Paris*

### I

Marcel Robinier, posing as John Caradoc de Colorado, returns to Paris after spending ten years in California, accompanied by his Canadian friend Dominique. Marcel knows that his father suffered financial ruin at the hands of fraudsters and died exhausted and miserable, and wants to find those responsible. He is intrigued by a girl they see at the Père-Lachaise cemetery and follows her, saving her from the drunken Jacques Crambard (l’*Épouardeur*), and walking her home. The girl introduces herself as Cécile, fiancée of Savinien Brévan. Savinien is the son of the late Michel Brévan, the oldest and most faithful friend of Marcel’s own father. As Marcel gets to know the young couple, he is trailed by *Pain-de-Blanc* and his fellow

criminals, who meet in the *Bibine du père Pernet* tavern, and plan to break into Marcel's residence, at the place de l'Europe.

Chambras, a police agent, arrives with numerous pieces of information for Marcel, who claims to be helping a French friend to recuperate his father's lost fortune. In particular, Chambras has located the family of the silversmith, Dortis, for whom Robinier worked as a clerk after his ruin. Dortis left a considerable fortune to his wife and children, who live in a hôtel on the quai de Valmy. Chambras is suspicious of Marcel's *valet*, who he recognizes from somewhere, and warns him to be vigilant.

To keep abreast of society gossip and help his investigations Marcel, helped by his banker, the baron de Gondo, joins a *cercle* (gentleman's club). De Gondo agrees to employ Savinien at his bank. Marcel hears gossip about Oscar Belamer and Madame Pouliguen, the wife of a naval officer who is a good friend of his. On his way home, he finds the unfaithful wife waiting for her lover. He convinces her to go home and remove all evidence of their planned elopement. They are watched from the shadows by the sinister Tolbiac, who works for Madame Pouliguen's family, and is in love with her. Heading back to the place de l'Europe, Marcel saves Dominique from an attack.

Marcel visits Madame Dortis, where he is unsettled by Tolbiac, who speaks unfavourably of Marcel's father. Madame Dortis introduces her two daughters to Marcel: Claire Dortis, to whom he warms immediately, and Clotilde Pouliguen, the woman who he met and helped yesterday, and to whom he promises his continued discretion. Madame Alexis, Cécile's neighbour, and her niece Coralie discuss Marcel when he visits again. René Dortis (brother of Claire and Clotilde) arrives to see Coralie, and buys jewels for her. Ernest de Gondo (son of the baron) arrives and is furious.

Marcel attends a party hosted by de Gondo. Chambras is there, and has had a tip-off that thieves disguised as servants are planning to commit a crime that evening. Marcel recognizes one of de Gondo's guests as William Atkins de Mariposa, a man who launched a campaign of violence and intimidation and made several attempts to kill Marcel during a long-running dispute over a Californian mine. Dominique thought he had killed Atkins, but his scarred face and missing eye leaves Marcel in no doubt that his nemesis is still alive. The two men snub each other when de Gondo tries to introduce them.

At dinner, Marcel is surprised to see Chambras now waiting on tables. Having infiltrated the servants/criminals, Chambras has discovered that their plan is to burgle Marcel, rather than de Gondo. Chambras believes that Marcel's *valet de chambre*, Philippe, is involved. Realizing that Dominique, who has left the party early, may be in danger, Marcel and Chambras rush to the place de l'Europe. As they arrive, they see two men jump through the glass of the greenhouse onto the railway track below. They realize the second man was Dominique, pursuing a burglar. They fear the two men must be dead, but there is no sign of them at all when they go to investigate.

Chambras interrogates 'Philippe', and tricks him into revealing his true identity: Touillard, ex-Poissy convict. Touillard denies knowing l'*Épouardeur*, but Chambras is convinced the men are linked and that the latter was one of those responsible for stealing from Marcel's father. An enthusiastic Marcel agrees to accompany Chambras on his subsequent investigations.

Meanwhile, a naked Dominique has been found at the porte de Clichy. He explains how he fell into a waggon of sand carried by a passing train and tussled

with the criminal (*Pain-de-Blanc*), who pushed him into the Seine. A ravenous *Pain-de-Blanc* heads back towards Paris and goes to see le père Machin, a receiver of stolen goods. He is intrigued to recognize a veiled baronne de Gondo leaving as he arrives. Machin gives him money for food in exchange for details about the baronne.

### NUITS – *Les Nuits de Paris*

In 1835, an elderly man lies dying, tended to by his nephews, and scared he will not see his children again. He doesn't know that the nephews have intercepted his letters to their cousins so that they can be rewarded and the sons punished. When the doorbell rings, Pascal and the nephews stab the man who appears on the threshold. Their uncle, who has struggled out of bed, recognizes the victim and dies. Pascal registers the death of the old man, and the elder nephew says he is the closest relative. They decide to bury their cousin instead of their uncle, to get rid of the body, and throw the other body into the Seine. Unbeknownst to them, Pascal's niece has seen what they have done.

A number of years later, Franck, a young doctor, is in love with Silvia, daughter of the comte de Compans, but Silvia is engaged to Octave Gaudin. Lopès, a new acquaintance of Franck, wants to buy a property on the Bièvre, which Franck agrees to visit with him. While visiting, they meet 'le Monténégrin'. The *gardien* of the maison de la Bièvre, which belongs to Compans, is Pascal. The property has remained unsold for fifteen years, amid rumours of ghosts and crime. When Lopès tells the story of his brother's murder at the hands of his nephews, Pascal blanches. The story of Lopès's brother is that of Franck's father. Lopès accompanies Franck to the bal de l'Opéra, where they are shocked at Gaudin's behaviour. A 'domino' says she knows about what happened to Franck's father and who was responsible. Gaudin, losing interest in Silvia, turns his amorous attentions to the mysterious woman.

Compans plays down the stories about the maison de la Bièvre when Lopès and Franck go to see him, but Lopès wonders if Compans is one of the two nephews. Pascal's niece, the only witness to the crime, has disappeared. Pascal goes to see his brother André in the cité Doré. The criminals have threatened André's daughter to buy his silence. He says if they don't return his daughter within eight days, he will speak out, but Pascal refuses. The two men are equally determined to stand their ground. Pascal stabs André as Lopès arrives.

Gaudin has found where the 'inconnue' lives but, when he goes to see her, she says he has a rival for her affections: Franck, who arrives as Gaudin leaves. The woman is replaced by 'le Monténégrin' who, when Lopès arrives with news that André has been murdered, collapses. Franck loosens his clothes to make him more comfortable and realizes that he is a woman: Fernande is André's daughter (Pascal's niece). Compans decides to invite Franck to marry Sylvia (as Gaudin only wants her money), knowing that, if Franck is his son-in-law, he will not betray him.

As Gaudin and Silvia prepare to elope, Lopès laces Pascal's wine with a white powder, causing him to collapse. Lopès then revives him by administering drops. Under the influence of the drugs, Pascal tells the truth about the crime, and his confessions are heard by the *procureur du roi*. Franck's father's fortune will be restored to him and Pascal and Compans brought to justice.

On their way to the coast, from where they will leave for America, Lopès and Franck are involved in a coach accident. They go to get help and seek shelter, and

see another man ahead of them on foot. It is Pascal, who demands money from Fernande to fund Compans's escape from Brest. She refuses and threatens to turn him in. He steals the money and stabs her, as Lopès and Franck arrive. They are on their way to America, but will wait until she is well again before leaving. Franck asks her to marry him.

In Brest, Pascal pays a sea captain to take him and another passenger on board his ship, which is going to New York. A canon shot announces the escape of a convict and the *commissaire* of the *bagne* de Brest lies in wait for the escapee. Pascal and Compans board the ship. Davidson, the captain, shoots Pascal when he attacks him, killing him outright. Compans is taken back to the *bagne*, where he dies a few years later. Davidson, Lopès, Franck and Fernande depart as planned.

### **NYORK – *Les Mystères de New-York***

Effie Tillinghast takes Bam, a young criminal, to see her dying father, a banker who has been ruined by an old friend, Adams Macy. Bam is really John Hardwin, son of Michaël Hardwin, hanged ten years ago for murdering his brother Mark (in reality, murdered by Tillinghast and Macy). Tillinghast says he can help Bam to adopt a new identity and make a fortune. Bam must marry Effie and through them, Tillinghast will wreak revenge on Macy from beyond the grave.

In a Manhattan art gallery, we are introduced to financier Adams Macy, his disabled daughter Mary, his henchman Warton, Edwards Longsword and painter Netty. Warton has pressurized Antonia Widman into an arranged marriage, but she has fallen in love with Edwards Longsword and fallen pregnant. Warton will harm the illegitimate child unless Longsword agrees to blow up the Franklin oil well (a threat to Warton and Macy). Longsword refuses, then wanders desperately through the streets of New York, where he meets poet Dan Yoke. They meet Clump, a convict who coerces children into a life of crime, and his two new recruits, twin brothers Michaël and Jemmy, just arrived in the city.

To blackmail Macy, Bam, now going under the name of Hugh Barnett, and helped by Trip and Mop, sets up a newspaper, the *Cat o' nine tails*. Effie rejects Bam when he declares his love for her. When Macy comes to the office wanting to buy all remaining copies of the newspaper and asking to meet the *directeur*, the spurned Bam sees his opportunity to stand up to Effie and decides to go to the meeting himself. Bam tells Macy who he is and asks to be his business associate. Macy says Bam must marry his daughter to cement their business relationship. Bam tells Effie of Macy's visit and, when she insists on seeing him herself, stabs her.

The night Antonia gives birth, tended to by Evans, Netty and Yoke, Clump, accompanied by Michaël and Jemmy, attempts to burgle the house, but is killed doing so. Yoke recognizes the twins from the night in the city, and Netty recognizes her two lost brothers. The three are the children of Mark Hardwin, murdered by Macy and Tillinghast, and Bam their cousin. Their mother came to New York to find the murderers and Netty promised her on her deathbed to avenge her father's death. Together the friends decide they will stop Macy.

Bam has agreed to blow up Franklin in Longsword's place, and plans to kill Trip and Mop in the process, but Colosse, the scientist friend of Yoke, Evans and Netty, diverts the explosion, bringing the *Pierre d'Enfer* down and thus saving Franklin. Bam, furious at Colosse, is killed in a supernatural struggle with Effie's ghost, and Warton is killed while trying to kidnap Antonia's newborn child.

Intent on becoming governor of New York, Macy has his recalcitrant daughter committed to an asylum. At the height of his campaign, Macy is arrested by Yoke and President Andrew Johnson, who forces him to repay his victims and leave the country. As he departs, he is shot by Mary, escaped from the asylum, who then dies herself. At the end of the novel we are informed that Netty will marry Evans, Yoke and Longsword will go to Europe, and Trip and Mop will join the police.

### **PASSY – *Les Mystères de Passy***

In the play's prologue, Muffe expresses concern about the influence of Sue's *Mystères de Paris* on his master, Pandolphe. Pandolphe's uncle, Dumontel, announces that he must marry his cousin, Cécile. Pandolphe is consumed with guilt about a mysterious crime, for which he plans to atone by mimicking Sue's Rodolphe. He writes to his uncle stating that he does not want to marry his cousin, referring him to Sue's novel for further explanations, and asks Muffe to deliver the letter. As part of his plan to emulate Rodolphe, Pandolphe has invited three unsavoury characters, Ripaillon, Gargaillon and la Colle, to visit him. As Muffe arrives with news of Dumontel's anger, the men drink and carouse. Pandolphe's dream sequence begins.

The first act opens in a tavern, where *saltimbanques* le Sourineur and la Gouailleuse entertain the customers. When Pandolphe arrives, he and le Sourineur (Gargaillon) recognize each other. La Gouailleuse much prefers Pandolphe to Gourand, an old man who is pursuing her. Le Sourineur suggests Pandolphe only invited him to dinner in order to steal his artist. The two men prepare to fight. La Gouailleuse continues to reject Gourand's advances. Le Sourineur says la Gouailleuse (a sword-swallower) is his most valuable artist, but Pandolphe says he is selling her too cheaply and insists on paying more. Pandolphe will place her on his farm in Auteuil. Pandolphe feels that he is beginning to atone for his crime, and is relieved. Le Sourineur invites la Colle to join the circus troop to have weights attached to his huge beard, but he has other money-making ideas, and suggests they burgle the home of a newcomer to Passy (Pandolphe). Pandolphe struggles to understand the group's metaphorical use of language and considers informing the police of their plans. La Colle throws him into the cellar, which is filling with water. Porter Criquelet tries to shave, but his mirror is moved by Gambrillard.

The next day, Rizette (a friend of la Gouailleuse from prison) tells Criquelet that Pandolphe has been burgled. Criquelet says the three men Pandolphe invited to dine with him must be responsible. Criquelet goes to inspect the water damage in the cellar and tells Rizette there is a monster in there. She opens the trapdoor and Pandolphe appears, complaining and throwing frogs from his pockets. Pandolphe soliloquizes, reiterating his determination to follow in Rodolphe's footsteps. Rather than turning la Colle over to the police, he decides to take the law into his own hands and, helped by Muffe and Criquelet, cuts off la Colle's beard, ignoring his pleas and protestations.

When Gourand, an insurance salesman, offers Pandolphe insurance, telling him that Sara Mic-Mac-Gogo can provide a reference for him, Pandolphe is alarmed. Gourand knows that Pandolphe was supposed to marry her, but jilted her and ran away to Monaco. Mic-Mac-Gogo now wants to get rid of her rival, la Gouailleuse. Pandolphe says he will fight her to the death, but Gourand, also in love with la Gouailleuse, will help Sara. La Tigresse is uneasy about the plans to drown la Gouailleuse, but Gourand explains that he plans to save her. Le Sourineur, fishing,

sees a woman's body in the river and calls for help. Gourand arrives and takes her. When Pandolphe and Muffe arrive, they realize the drowning girl was la Gouailleuse and that she has been taken by Gourand. They knock on the door of his house, but no one answers. They decide to get in through the chimney, but get stuck. Trying to widen the chimney cavity, le Sourineur drops his knife, which falls onto the stage, just as la Gouailleuse is saying she needs a knife to defend herself. She urges them to be quiet, as Gourand will kill them if he hears them. Gourand's continued declarations of love to la Gouailleuse are punctuated by comic interjections from Pandolphe and le Sourineur in the chimney. Gourand allows la Gouailleuse to tie him to the chimney while she sings. She passes a cord to Pandolphe, so that he can pull Gourand back whenever he gets too close to her, but Gourand cuts the cord with le Sourineur's knife. The chimney falls apart, and the sooty men fall onto the stage. They stop Gourand from fleeing with la Gouailleuse, who will leave for Monaco with Pandolphe instead.

Pandolphe, le Sourineur, la Gouailleuse and Rizette have to wait in the forest for their damaged coach to be repaired. To thank him, Pandolphe wants to send le Sourineur to Alger, but he refuses the offer. Pandolphe says le Sourineur and Rizette will probably be happier than him, and la Gouailleuse demands to know his guilty secret. Pandolphe explains how, incensed when his godfather berated him for being naïve and stupid in his dealings with Sara Mic-Mac-Gogo, he deliberately removed his godfather's healthy tooth. Unaware of Pandolphe's 'crime', the godfather left him all his money when he died.

The travellers seek refuge in a forest cabin, but the door is opened by an unsympathetic la Colle, who wants compensation for the removal of his beard. Gourand and a band of poachers arrive and carry off the two women, and la Colle has le Sourineur and Pandolphe tied to trees. Le Sourineur is frustrated at not having managed to get himself killed for Pandolphe, despite his best efforts. Le Sourineur manages to free them and they set fire to the cabin, only for Rizette to appear, telling them that la Gouailleuse is also inside. A distraught Pandolphe asks the poachers to shoot him. Gunshots are heard as the curtain falls.

In the epilogue, Pandolphe wakes from his dream, a changed man. Muffe helps him get rid of his guests, who he now sees as parasites. When Dumontel arrives, Pandolphe tells him he is cured of his obsession with *Les Mystères de Paris*, and asks his uncle to destroy his letter and not show it to his cousin. He asks to see Cécile, and is delighted to recognize her as the Gouailleuse of his dream. The concluding moral is provided by Dumontel: generous impulses must be tempered, as not all the poor and needy are deserving cases.

### **PIEUV – *Les Pieuvres de Paris***

Sir John Mortimer, an English banker in dire financial straits, receives a letter from Turnier, a friend who has had to leave France, having participated in a huge theft from a large rail company. He will be brought back to Paris and imprisoned, but, he tells Mortimer, has hidden 250,000F, intended for his two daughters, in a piece of furniture. Mortimer heads to Paris, where Turnier's children, tyrannized by landlord Salomon Baudry, are destitute and will be soon be homeless. Mortimer buys the piece of furniture at an auction, bettering rival bids from Baudry and a representative of Turnier's daughters, and plans to return to London, but Turnier intercepts him en



route, accusing him of theft. When the police become involved, Turnier is dismissed as mad and attempts suicide. Believing Turnier dead, Mortimer returns to London.

In 1853, Paris is gripped by 'l'affaire Blanca', unable to ascertain whether the comte de Blanca's death by poisoning was a case of suicide, or murder. Courtisane Gilberte Desmaret, who had a relationship with the comte, is questioned, but is unwilling to give her real name or any details of her past. It emerges that she borrowed money from Baudry in order to clear the comte's gambling debts. She loved him and so can't have committed the crime. The enigmatic Bridard is sure the comte didn't kill himself. Edgar Mortimer, the son of John Mortimer and a friend of the late comte de Blanca, takes the comte's young cousin, Henry, under his wing.

At 20, rue du Marché-Lenoir, we are introduced to a variety of characters, including Edmée Ducoudray, sister of Marthe (Gilberte) and her guardian, Papa Ducoudray, concierge maman Doxie and criminals Philippe and Polyte. The sixteen-year-old Edmée and Edgar Mortimer (going by the name of Octave) are in love. Ducoudray prohibits Marthe from visiting her sister. Marthe leaves hurriedly when she sees Edgar (it emerges that she is also in love with him) and urges Ducoudray to ask Balcam about the real identity of 'Octave', but the latter begs Ducoudray to trust him and not oblige him to reveal his secret yet.

Edgar is pursued by the mysterious Alice, la *Buveuse de sang*, who is really Fanny Balcam, daughter of John Mortimer's *commis principal*. Edgar was in love with Fanny, until his father died in suspicious circumstances, killed by the same poison as the comte de Blanca. Edgar found Fanny going through his father's papers and later found a letter in which she confessed her love for him and agreed to marry him. Edgar left her and went to Paris, and Fanny disappeared. Edgar now rebuffs Fanny's advances.

When Balcam tells Edgar the story of his father's crime, he vows to make amends. Meanwhile, Henry de Blanca has fallen in love with Alice, but she is indifferent to him, her strongest feelings reserved for Edgar, with whom she is obsessed, and *Jane la Rousse*, with whom she has a bitter rivalry (Jane, it emerges, is actually Fanny's estranged mother). Fanny has Edmée abducted and urges Ducoudray to ask Edmée's suitor about his father's role in the 'drame de l'*Hôtel des ventes*'. Edmée is scared by a 'monstre' (her father, who is, in fact, still alive) and runs away. She bumps into Marthe (entertaining the vicomte d'Espars, as Gilberte), who takes her home, but warns her, in veiled terms, about 'Octave', believing that the truth would kill her.

Three months later, Baudry has been found dead, killed by the same poison as the other victims. Banned by Ducoudray from seeing Edgar, Edmée is terribly ill. She is tended to by Claire, employed by *Jane la Rousse*, who gives her a dark potion to drink. Bridard takes the potion to a pharmacist, who identifies it as a slow-acting poison. Bridard insists Mortimer make Edmée believe he has someone else. Edmée and Ducoudray receive opera tickets. Edmée goes reluctantly, sees 'Octave' there with Alice, as planned, and collapses. An old maid (Jane) is employed to look after Edmée. Turnier tries to strangle her, but she escapes.

Edgar receives a letter from the suicidal Henry de Blanca. He explains to Edmée and Marthe that he hates the woman he was seen with, as she murdered his father and his best friend, and that the outing was a staged 'comédie' to protect Edmée, who she wanted to kill. The true story of what happened to Turnier appears in the newspaper. As Edgar has returned the Turnier money, there is now no obstacle to his union with Edmée. A desperate Henry stabs Fanny in the face, realizing that disfigurement is worse than death to a woman who uses her beauty as a weapon.

Unable to bear the thought of Edgar seeing her disfigured face, Fanny drinks poison. Edmée and Edgar are reconciled.

In July 1866, the narrator meets Bridard in Brittany. The two participate in 'la pêche à la pieuvre', prompting Bridard to tell his acquaintance about the formidable 'pieuvres de Paris'. Bridard arrests Philippe and Polyte, who have been betrayed by Claire.

### **SCHOLL – *Les Nouveaux Mystères de Paris***

In 1820, the young comte de Navarran, detained for the night for a minor indiscretion, reads an inscription on his cell wall advising whoever reads the message to dig at the foot of a designated tree in the bois de Vincennes. He follows the instructions and unearths a cask, but is surprised by a *gardien*, who he strikes with his spade, killing him.

The casket contains the map of a mysterious hotel in the rue Saint-Louis. He goes there and, in the property's underground, discovers the Société des Vingt-et-Un, a criminal gang more formidable than any other, given that the social position of the members places them above suspicion. Navarran agrees to become their leader, the *Fourgat*. Navarran marries and has two children, but they are abducted by Robert Kodom, a rich banker and member of the Vingt-et-Un, thus tightening the group's hold over him.

In November 1853, Monseigneur, and his servant Aly, coveting the *Fourgat*'s power and wealth, get into the hotel and murder him. Surypère offers to get rid of the body for them. Instead he takes Navarran, who is still alive, to the château de Mesnil.

Nearby lives honest widow Madeleine Deslions, with her two children, Jean and Louise. Jean is gamekeeper for the comte de Navarran, who holds him in high esteem. Both the Deslions children have romantic entanglements with members of the nobility: Louise has been dishonoured by Raoul de Villepont, while Jean is passionately in love with the proud and beautiful Mlle de Charmeney. On learning that de Villepont is to marry Mlle de Charmeney, Jean shoots him.

A dying Navarran intervenes, providing Jean with a false identity so that he can evade justice, and gives him his will, which requests that Jean inherit the leadership of the Vingt-et-Un, whose power will protect him and enable him to take revenge. Jean goes to inspect the hôtel des Vingt-et-Un and falls through a trapdoor into an underground cell.

Meanwhile, Louise has fled with her child and collapsed, starving and exhausted, at the door of a residence in the rue de Ponthieu, home of Wanda de Remeney, a Hungarian baroness and the mistress of Robert Kodom. Louise is given shelter by Edwige, daughter of the adulterous pair. In fact, it transpires, Edwige was bought by Kodom, to replace the baronne's real child, who he murdered, encasing the infant's body in a wall. The opportunistic crook Combalou has employed the vicomte de Floustignac to make an official acknowledgement of the paternity of Edwige, so that Combalou can procure money from the family when she marries Adrien de Saulles. During an evening of entertainment organized by the baronne de Remeney, a hypnotist puts Louise in a trance, and she sees the body of the murdered child in the wall cavity. Frightened, she flees with her own baby.

Jean, in the underground of the hôtel des Vingt-et-Un, has managed to dig his way through to a neighbouring cell, where he discovers the baron de Remeney, who

has been kept there by Robert Kodom for seventeen years. He tells Jean that Navarran's children were entrusted to a certain Madeleine Deslions. Jean realizes that he and Louise are the offspring of the murdered *Fourgat*. He vows to avenge Navarran and to break up the Vingt-et-Un. The baron and Jean escape via a sewer and board a yacht belonging to Navarran, which takes them to London.

## VIEUX – *Les Mystères du vieux Paris*

### I

Coquastre, abandoned on the steps of Notre-Dame as a child, is taken in by the honest, hardworking Maître Blondel and his wife, who also have a child of their own, Denise, before the wife dies. On the eve of the arrival of Henri II in Paris, the young Coquastre and his friends stop at the *taverne du père Quinepue*. Rustique, a newcomer to Paris, arrives at the tavern. Coquastre's friend d'Aubigny challenges him to a duel. Rustique has been in prison, and learnt his impressive swordsmanship from Carlos, his jailer, who (he believes) he killed while escaping. The group rescues Hugues, one of the three sons of the cruel and bloodthirsty prévôt, who has been attacked by Jacques-le-Majeur.

Coquastre invites Rustique to stay with his family. An old man, le Lombard, watches from the shadows. He lives in the tower of the *église Saint-Jacques-la-Boucherie* and harbours a terrible secret. The prévôt has enlisted Mouchy to follow and spy on le Lombard.

A month later, Rustique has fallen in love with Marcelle, the prévôt's daughter. A mysterious chest, from an anonymous source, containing clothes, swords and a bag of money, is delivered to him. As Henri II's procession comes through the city, Rustique becomes separated from his friends and meets Mouchy, who, Rustique is surprised to discover, already knows his name. Rustique is unable to hide his attraction to Marcelle from Mouchy, who invites the young man to a ball that evening, promising him Marcelle's hand.

### II

At the ball, Rustique wears the clothes from the trunk, which bear the prévôt's coat of arms. He eavesdrops on a conversation between two women, Eléonore and Diane (de Poitiers), who discuss a young man and wonder whether Mouchy has found him. Rustique wonders if they are talking about him. He professes his love to Marcelle, who warns him against Mouchy. He vows to solve the mystery and to protect Marcelle.

Rustique sees Mouchy leaving with Marcelle and, attempting to stab him, injures his horse. He follows the trail of blood in order to find Marcelle, which takes him to Viviane (Jacques-le-Majeur's daughter). She warns him against fighting Mouchy and says he must trust her to save Marcelle. Viviane offers him a sword, and Rustique leaves through the window. The next day, Rustique wonders if it has all been a dream, but still has Viviane's sword. An anonymous note attached to it summons him to a meeting that evening, and warns him to beware of Mouchy.

Mouchy tells him he will have to kill the prévôt and his sons if he wants to marry Marcelle. A duel between Rustique and Georges, the prévôt's eldest son, will take place the next day. The comtesse Eléonore warns Rustique that there are things he does not know about himself, and tries to deter him from fighting Georges. Eléonore says she cannot tell him who she is at the moment but one day will be able

to tell him how their lives are linked. After a sleepless night, Rustique goes ahead with the duel. When Coquastre arrives, he thinks that Rustique and Georges are both dead.

Carlos arrives and tells Mouchy that Rustique escaped from prison two months ago. Carlos and Mouchy both vow to catch him. Meanwhile, Blondel is keen to become an alderman, so that Denise can have a better life. Mouchy warns him that Coquastre's friendship with Rustique is a threat to these ambitions, given that the latter is trying to kill the prévôt. Denise defends Rustique. Despite his reservations, Blondel agrees that Rustique can stay. But Rustique escapes through a window, not wanting to put the Blondels in danger. Coquastre and his friends have dressed up as Rustique, so as to confuse those sent by prévôt to follow him. Rustique recognizes Carlos, and Coquastre and Carlos fight.

Le Lombard fights with Amaury, the prévôt's third son, while Rustique fights with Jacques-le-Majeur. An emotional Lombard stops Jacques and lets the two young men go, promising to explain himself tomorrow. Le Lombard is full of praise for Rustique, even though he has thwarted their attempts to wreak revenge on the prévôt, but now has his sights set on Marcelle.

### III

Armed men search Blondel's home for Rustique, but he is not there. Mouchy orders the men to take Blondel, telling Denise her father will be returned when she brings them Rustique. Carlos suggests using Marcelle to get to Rustique. Le Lombard and Jacques administer a potion to the sleeping Marcelle, and leave via a secret staircase. Le Lombard is adamant that the prévôt must be kept alive, so he can be punished, but wants to kill the prévôt's daughter, just as the prévôt killed his son. Le Lombard tries to hide Marcelle from Rustique and explains that the prévôt tried to kill him and stole his child. When Marcelle wakes up, Rustique decides to return her to her father.

As the anxious prévôt waits for news of his daughter, we discover that le Lombard/Réault was the husband of Eléonore and is Rustique's father. Mouchy, at the prévôt's bidding, ordered him to leave Paris and never return, and separated the child from his mother. The prévôt, reunited with Marcelle, tells her that Rustique tricked her and tells Mouchy to lock up both le Lombard and Rustique. The prévôt's three sons defend Rustique, but Mouchy says Rustique and le Lombard will soon be dead.

Mouchy tells Rustique to come to see Viviane that evening, where he will tell him about his father. It transpires that Viviane was also separated from her real father (Carlos) at an early age. Mouchy has asked Viviane to help him trick Rustique, but she is in love with him, and so gives him a phial of sleeping potion, rather than poison, and tells him to play dead. Marcelle arrives. They are unsure of whether they can trust Viviane, but Marcelle drinks half of the potion, and Rustique the other half. The prévôt and le Lombard arrive and discover their bodies. As the two fathers fight, Marcelle and Rustique both revive. Rustique realizes le Lombard is his father, and forgives Mouchy, who then dies. Coquastre marries Denise and Rustique marries Marcelle. They move to the country château where Rustique spent part of his childhood.

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